

CHINOOK

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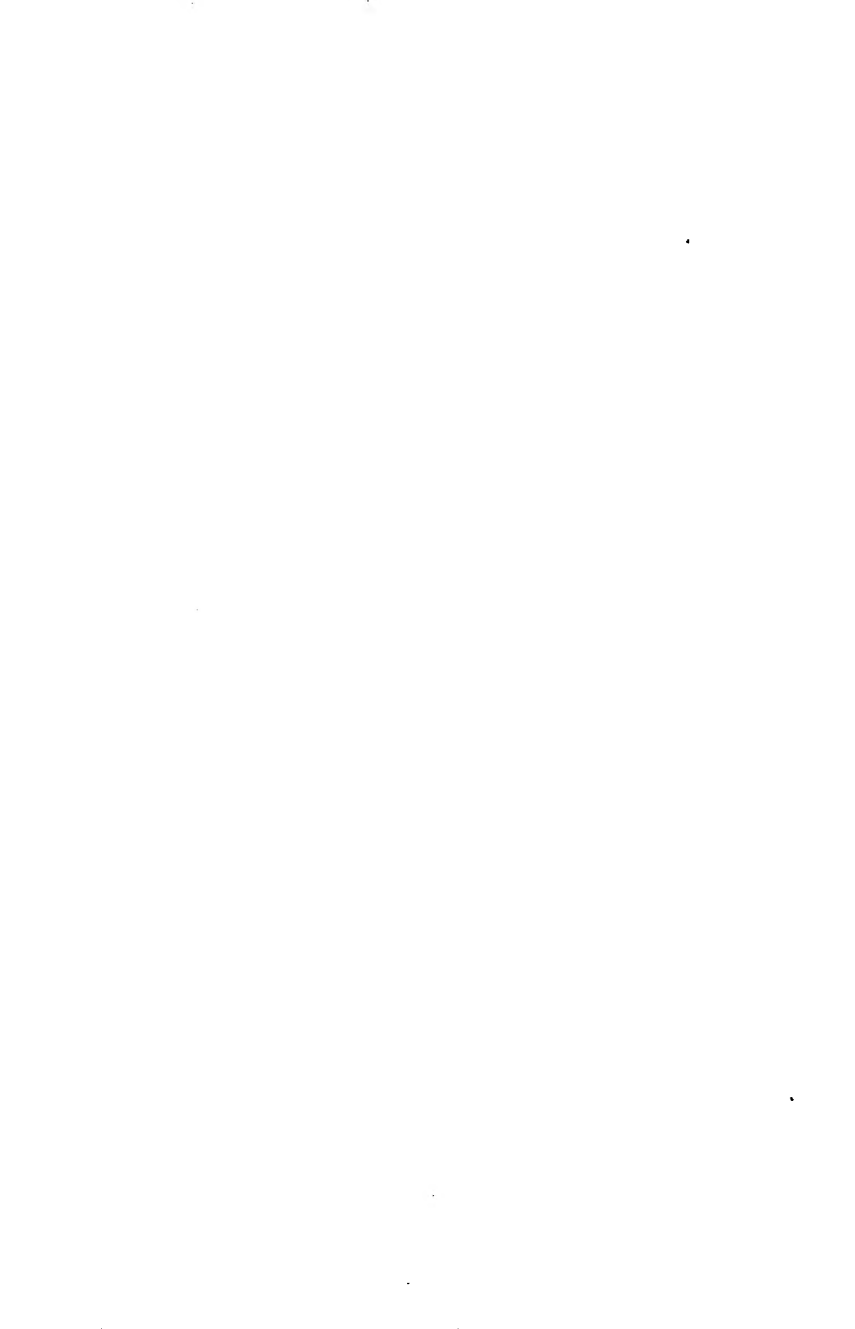
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CHINOOK

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BY

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To
MOLLIE CURRIE
AND THE WOMEN OF THE TOWN
WHO SAVED MY LIFE

*The Chinook is a warm wind blowing from
the west which melts the snow in the spring.*

PART I

CHAPTER I

SHE was two dollars short. She added the column up again. Then she made it two-seventy-five. Once again and it was two dollars short. Mrs Patterson sat at a little table at the back of the parlour behind the quick-lunch counter. The cash-register had gone out of order that morning and she was writing down the amount taken through the day. She called out to Catherine who was in the kitchen, washing up: "Say, Catherine."

"Yes, Momma."

"How much did you say you gave me after that last party went right out?"

"Three-forty."

"Are you certain?"

"Certain."

"How long will you be washing up?"

"Just finished."

"I'd like you to get this right for me before I go out. I've got to go to Guerin's and I've worried over this till I feel queer."

Catherine came in to her from the kitchen and stood over her wiping her hands in a towel. She said: "I make that eight-fifty, I reckon that's not so bad."

"Eight-fifty?"

"Sure it is."

"My head's just swimming."

"Surely to Goodness you haven't got to go to the Guerins: you've had a mighty hard day and you're looking that tired."

"I promised."

"I'll go around."

"I said I'd go. Catherine?"

"Yes, Momma."

"I've paid Winston his last dollar."

"That's fine." Her hands were dry but she went on mechanically wiping them in the towel. Mrs Patterson was putting the money into the cash-box. "I reckon," she said, "he won't be wanting to hang around here now I've paid him off."

"I reckon not, Momma."

"He's all right in his way."

"It was real nice of him lending the money."

"Oh, sure it was."

"Will you be long at Guerin's?"

"Maybe."

Catherine went back to the kitchen. She heard her mother go up the stairs and then presently come down again. Something told her: "Momma's bad and I reckon she won't have me asking how she's feeling, she looked real bad just now." She went back into the parlour. "Good-bye, Momma, maybe the air'll do you good."

Mrs Patterson kissed Catherine. "Maybe," she said.

Catherine stood on the door-step and watched her

mother as she went down the street. It was a strange hour for her to go off to see the Guerins and as promptly as she had done. It must be a relief to her to know she had paid Winston Clark the money she had borrowed from him to start this place. It was queer a man of his standing lending her the money. After all, he could never have had much regard for her father. Ned Patterson had not invited regard. Someone had called him 'the conjurer' because he seemed to put dollar notes into one pocket and take them, simultaneously, out of another. And the notes vanished as mysteriously. It was five years since he had died and her mother had made good, in that she had paid his debts and her own to Winston Clark, who had lent her the money to start the business.

Catherine watched her mother out of sight. She would go up to her room and tidy herself. Brush her hair and fix it into the slide at the back. She wore a Magyar blouse with elbow sleeves and open at the neck. Her skirt fitted her tightly round the hips. As soon as her mother disappeared Catherine went back into the parlour and started to go up the stairs. Before she reached the landing she heard someone step into the parlour and tap on the table. She went down again. It was a man called Joseph Martinez. He was a farmer who lived thirty miles out along by the river. Catherine thought; as soon as she saw him: "I reckon he saw Momma go out, he sure likes to get me alone."

He was standing there in front of her with his hat

in his hand. He asked her: "Too late for a cup of coffee?"

"Sure, no, I can warm you up a cup: are you driving out tonight?"

"Maybe, maybe not."

She noticed he had had his hair cut and it was not growing in its usual way over his collar at the back. He had black hair, well oiled. Catherine had often wondered why he came to their place for he looked the type who obviously came into the town for something other than coffee; but sometimes you could be mistaken in people and maybe he was not as bad as he seemed. He spoke in an abrupt way and as though, even with Catherine, he did not intend to waste too much breath in talking to her. Then sometimes, sitting at a table, he would talk excitedly as though he had been set on fire and wanted to say all that he had to say before the flames went out. In a kind of a way Catherine liked him because he seemed, at times, so earnest and as though he covered himself up so that you could not be sure what he was like underneath his reserve. She fetched his coffee and then sat down in a chair a little way away from him. She did not intend to stay long there listening to him if he chose to talk, but she wanted to make it plain that she wanted him to be as quick as possible, for she had other things to do. He asked her: "Mrs Patterson out?"

Catherine nodded. "Only around the corner."

He did not speak for a moment or two but looked

at her and then down into his cup. Presently, he said: "Do you know what I've come in for?"

"Sure," she said, "for coffee and you've got it."

He laughed, just shortly, as though he did not mean to lose breath over laughing any more than he did over talking. "No, you're wrong." He drawled his words out. He tipped up his cup and drank the last drop of coffee out of it: then he set the cup down on the table and gave it a little push away from him. Catherine felt relieved. She got up and went over for the cup for she thought if she took it away into the kitchen he would have to go. As she took up the cup he took hold of her wrist but instantly let go knowing that she would shake him off if he did not. He looked up at her and said: "You'd best marry me and come out on my place to live."

She shook her head.

"Why not?"

"Momma'd say I was too young." She thought: "Gee, Momma'd have a fit."

"I'll wait."

Catherine shook her head again. "No good, Joseph, I couldn't marry you."

After a moment, he said: "You waiting for somebody?"

"Not that I know of but that's no affair of yours, anyway." She thought: "I reckon he knows it's Winston that counts all right." Winston. Anybody that thought of Winston and Joseph Martinez in one

breath was pretty near crazy. Winston would never ask her to marry him, but it was worth while living just to see him once every now and again. Maybe, it was true what her mother had said, that he had been paying them visits that would stop now that debt was paid. He had been coming, Mrs Patterson guessed, to see that she was running the business as well as she could so that he would not be the loser in the long run. It was not the first time he had helped to put people on their feet, and if he was a bit careful to keep the people in sight, until he had been repaid, no one could blame him.

Joseph looked down at himself as though he was suddenly inspecting his clothes. Perhaps Catherine was comparing him to Winston Clark and other better dressed fellows who came to the café. No good for Catherine to wait for them to ask her to marry them. They did not come down this part of the town to look for a wife even when she had Catherine's looks.

He stood up and his hand, resting on the table, showed red and coarse. He said: "You don't believe I want you."

"Oh, yes," she said, "I believe you but I jest don't want to marry you."

She smiled at him, as much as to say: "So you can get along and find what you want some other place."

He did not smile at her. He held his hat in both his hands and looked at her, fixedly. "Maybe," he said, "you won't mind if I come around jest the same?"

"Sure, you come around jest whenever you want, but it won't make any difference."

He pulled a leather bag out of his pocket and began to fumble in it for some money. He produced a five-dollar bill. She took it from him and went to the table where the cash-box was kept behind the counter. The bill he had given her was begrimed with dirt and it smelt of tobacco. Though his face was washed clean he gave the impression that he was begrimed himself and Catherine suddenly felt she wanted to clear him out of the café. He had never found her alone before. The café was seldom as empty as this but it was some sort of a fête day. There were flags hanging out of the windows and on the flag-post outside the Parliament building.

She turned, and going back to him she handed him his change. He counted it before he let it fall into the leather bag. Catherine smiled. Winston Clark would have smiled too, for that was not his way of getting the most out of his transactions. Unless you took the trouble to figure things out Winston always seemed to be the giver and never the receiver. When Joseph Martinez had put his purse into his pocket and taken his hat from under his arm, he stood still as though he was reluctant to go. Catherine said to him: "I gotta heap of things to do before Momma gets back." She pushed the chair Martinez had been sitting in under the table. He began to go towards the door. As he went past her she noticed he smelt of unwashed clothes and stale smoke as the dollar bill had done. She made a

little grimace behind his back and saw, with relief, he stepped out on to the sidewalk without any hesitation. It suddenly struck her that perhaps she had been a little ungracious in refusing to marry him. And it could do no good to allow him to think that her preference for Winston Clark was the cause of her refusal. If Joseph got drunk at any of the neighbouring saloons he might talk if he wished to give vent to his jealousy, for she knew that he was jealous. There was no hope of her marrying Winston: he'd never take a wife, to live amongst the swell crowd he belonged to, that came from the part of the town she and her mother lived in. Down here close to the docks. She didn't deny that every now and again, when he made little excuses to come down there, she hoped he might, one day when she grew old enough, feel she could hold her own in any sphere he chose to take her.

And Joseph Martinez had an idea that she might marry him. Some hope. Even if it meant a home for herself and her mother, they would have to go on working just the same. And besides, there were other fellows. She did not know why she was thinking twice about this black-haired Frenchie, for that was what he was and nothing else. She was turning to go out of the parlour when she heard a hoot from an auto outside. She stood still. She would not go to the door again. He knew his way in. She wondered whether he knew the place might be deserted owing to the fête. He had been paid his last dollar and was coming to see her in

spite of it. Her mother'd think it queer and yet she could never tell him off because, in a way, they would be indebted to him all their lives. She wondered, anyway, why her mother should mind him coming down. Catherine reckoned that it was because people would say she was encouraging him on account of Catherine; it couldn't be on her mother's account. Winston was not likely to interest himself in a middle-aged woman, though he wasn't so very far off from her own age, if it came to that. Anyhow, here he was, quite accidentally hitting off a time when she was there alone and by a great good fortune, had missed Joseph Martinez, for she would not want Winston to think that she would so much as listen to Joseph Martinez suggesting she should marry him. She wasn't on a level with Martinez, and Winston at least knew that. She wished she had had time to change into her white shirtwaist, and yet, in a way, she liked to appear as though she could meet Winston on a level footing, dressed as she was. Her mother never seemed to appear any different to Winston or any of them, whatever she had on. She might be dressed for her morning's work or later in the day in the very best she could afford and even Winston Clark would stand talking to her as though she was equal to any of the women up town or who lived in the residential quarter where he lived himself. There was something about Mrs Patterson which never failed to impress others with respect. Perhaps, the same could be said of Catherine. There was a

fineness about the two of them which alone made it possible to carry on the work they did. But Catherine had the very smallest sense of inferiority when Winston Clark made his appearance though he often dispelled it with the little advances he made to her. They did not vary to the advances he had made from the time when she had been a child, just a little, perhaps, tinged with a familiarity that had not been there before. The fleeting idea through her mind that he had called in the hopes of finding her there helped to disperse her sense of inferiority. As he walked towards her across the parlour she sat down on one of the little tables, sideways, so that he had to approach her instead of her meeting him as a customer, half-way. He was country bred, his parents having emigrated from England before he was born. He had imbibed the mannerisms of the Canadian born. His father had made sufficient money to start him well in life. He meant to get very much further before he had finished. Anything that stood in his way he would shove on one side, metaphorically, throw it over his shoulder if it meant a better advantage to him. If he did not wish to see a thing he knew precisely when to shut his eyes to it and when to open them again. He professed to know how to get anything he wanted and how to get rid of anything he did not want. He succeeded in deceiving people in a very ingenious way. There were just as many as he chose in Quebec who could call him a 'good pal.' He would do a kind action and make it seem as though it was the promptings of his

nature, when, in reality, he was looking a long way ahead. He had a knack of finding stepping-stones for his feet, even though a torrent rushed by him. A careful housekeeper could not fill her larder better with what she needed months ahead, than Winston filled his life with the events he planned should happen to himself. And all the while seeming so casual about it. He closed the door now and came towards Catherine, looking round the parlour, surprised that he should find it so deserted. He took off his hat and threw it on to the table nearest him. He smoothed the top of his head. He appeared as though he was going bald but really his hair grew a long way back. He sat sideways on the table on which he had thrown his hat and looked at Catherine. She was looking at him, for when he was close to her she could never take her eyes off his. He said, looking round the parlour again:

"Where's everybody?"

"There's a fête on."

"Sure," he said. "I'd forgotten."

"Not that the men go but the place seems cleared of them, anyway."

"Well, I'm not complaining."

"They're welcome to make themselves scarce as far as I'm concerned."

"For why?"

"I don't mind a rest once now and awhile."

"Is that so? Too tired out to get me a packet of cigarettes?"

She smiled and went to the case where the tobacco was kept. She took from it the brand she knew he smoked and took it back to him. He was holding a five-dollar bill in his hand, out to her. She said: "I reckon you'll have to wait till Momma comes in, there isn't enough change."

He still held the bill out to her. "Another time will do, I might forget," he said.

"Don't matter if you do, I reckon you ain't a customer."

"No?"

He put the bill back in his pocket. She was holding the cigarettes out to him. He put his hand over hers and drew her a little nearer him. She stood her ground. She had her eyes on the door. Someone might come in. He, too, looked over at the door and then back at her and laughed. She tried to release her hand out of his, but he kept a firm grip. He asked: "Scared?"

She coloured. "For Mercy's sake, what should I be scared for?"

"Where's Mrs Patterson?"

"Gone around to Guerin's."

"For how long?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Long?"

"I reckon not: she's been gone a little time, maybe she'll be right home any minute."

Winston Clark smiled and released her hand, taking the cigarettes from her. She watched him tear the

packet across and take a cigarette from it. He put it between his lips and waited. She went to the counter and got a box of matches. He was filling his case with the remainder of the cigarettes. He heard her strike a match and held his head up. He was looking carefully at the tip of the cigarette while she lighted it. She blew out the match. She went on saying, as though neither of them had paused for those few minutes: "But if she don't come in I can give her a message."

"Don't you worry," he said, "I can look in again." He looked at her and smiled.

She said: "Momma's been looking tough these last few weeks: I sure get worried over her."

"Maybe, she needs a trip away somewhere."

"She wouldn't go."

She thought: 'Maybe, if he calls one day and sees how sick Momma looks, he'll offer for her to take a trip.'

He stood up and said he had an appointment down at the docks and maybe he'd look in on his way back. He told her not to worry her mother telling her he'd called, he'd look in later if he could. It was about a big café up town he had heard of and he thought she might like to buy it up: it had been a paying concern but the man who had run it had been knocked down a week ago.

"I reckon, she'll be in if you call back later."

"I can't promise."

"Sure, no," said Catherine. She watched him start his car and move away. His call left her half-satisfied,

half-frightened. When, for Mercy's sake, did a man care for a girl? There was Joseph Martinez, who had sat like a stuck pig and told her he wanted to marry her without so much as getting fussed up about the asking and here was Winston Clark taking the trouble to call though he had precious little to call for now, unless it was in order to see her. She wished he did not matter to her in the way he did. Otherwise, she could think about one or two of the younger men who came to the café. She was young in years but had worked hard enough to appear older than she was and she knew her mother would feel relieved when she had a home of her own, a home where her mother could come and live as well. She wondered whether that was what her mother worried over sometimes. The thought that if anything happened to her Catherine would be left on her own. She meant now to go up to her room and take twenty cents out of her own purse and put it in the cash-box for the packet of cigarettes Winston had had. Presently, she heard somebody enter the parlour below, for she always left the door open which led out into the passage, so that anybody making an entry could be heard. She started to go down, but she saw that it was her mother and that she was coming up the stairs. She looked grey and years older than when she had gone out a short time before. Catherine wondered whether her mother had witnessed an accident or whether she had had a fit of giddiness as she had a few weeks before. She began: "Momma——"

Mrs Patterson said nothing but sat on the edge of Catherine's bed. "Say, Momma——"

"I've sure had a shock, Catherine."

"A shock, Momma?"

"Yes, Catherine. I've been round to Doc Macneil's and he says there's something wrong. I've got to go to Hospital tomorrow."

"The Hospital—whatever for, Momma?"

"An operation."

"An operation?"

"Sure——"

Catherine ran to Mrs Patterson and put her arms round her. "Why, Momma," she began, and then started to cry. Mrs Patterson held her and said nothing. The shock of the news had suddenly broken her nerve. Her perseverance of the past years had told on her for she had worked with all her will and had never spoken one word of complaint. Now she stroked Catherine's hair as she had when Catherine had been a child. The two of them sobbed and clung together. Such a thing had never happened before. It was unlike either of them to give vent to their feelings but for a moment or two now they made no attempt to restrain their tears.

"Is it something inside, Momma?"

"They reckon so, Catherine, but cheer up, Honey, it ain't the operation that's worrying me, it's the expense just as I've paid off Winston and all these other debts left. I've got enough just to get into the Public ward's long as they don't keep me there too long."

"The Public ward, but Momma, you can't go there, why the Frenchies they have in there are just about fierce."

"I know that, Honey, but I can't help that, it's just got to be done."

"For Mercy's sake, can't we borrow the money?"

"Not for this, Honey, it would be on my mind as I went under the chloroform and I'd just worry myself to death."

"If only I'd married a rich guy some time back——"

Mrs Patterson laughed. "Why, Honey, then I shouldn't have you for my own when I came out of Hospital again. I'll be all right. See here, I'll go right round to Mrs Amand's or we'll have our supper first. Maybe, she'd have you stay there or come around here to sleep."

"Don't you go worrying your head about me, Momma, I'll be all right."

They both got up off the bed and Mrs Patterson told Catherine that if she'd go down and get the supper ready she'd look through some of her things and straighten things up in her room. Catherine held her mother fast against her for a moment and kissed her. They both laughed at their fears of a few moments before. "I'll be all right," Mrs Patterson assured her.

"Sure," said Catherine, "sure you will."

She went down and began to lay the table for supper. She thought: "Surely to Goodness, Winston wouldn't let Momma go to the Public ward if he knew. Happen

he'll come in as he said he would and if he does I'll sure ask him, I reckon he'd do it all right." She took some bacon out of the larder and forked several slices into the frying-pan. It sizzled away as she turned the gas up and put the kettle on at the same time. Life treated you to some good jokes. Here they'd been just crazy to think they had paid Winston off his five hundred and they had to start dishing dollar notes out again and getting mighty little back for them. Well, perhaps it was true that when one door banged it set another rattling so's your attention was drawn to it. She'd see her Momma through all right, somehow, that was certain.

As soon as Mrs Patterson had left her and gone around to Mrs Amand's, Catherine began to heat some water for she wanted to get some things washed for her mother to take to the Hospital. She'd iron them out the following morning. Before the kettle boiled the parlour door had opened and shut again so quickly that she guessed it was Winston Clark. She wondered whether he had really had an appointment as he said he had or whether he had sensed that by waiting there, just at that moment, would get him nothing as far as she was concerned. She would have thought he would have been a little more insistent than he had been if he had wanted to kiss her. She would have given in to him, very likely, and told her mother afterwards about it. She had never kept anything from her mother excepting how she felt all the

while about Winston. And that, she would not have kept a secret if it had been any other man. She slipped off her overall and stepped into the parlour. She said, right away to him: "Say, we're in trouble. Momma has been around to the doctor's and he says she's got to go right away to the Hospital tomorrow for an operation. I just feel desperate."

Winston began to go up close to her. She looked up into his face. "It must be something mighty bad or else they wouldn't hurry her into the Hospital this way, and what's so bad is that there's no money for a private ward and she's got to go in with the Frenchies and that rough crowd—oh, Gee, I guess it's cruel."

Winston looked down at her. "Say, Winston," she had never called him Winston before, but she and her mother did when they spoke of him together, "I suppose you couldn't let me have the money for Momma to go into a private ward, we'd pay you back quick—I reckon it'd be three-fifty a day but it'd be worth it, she'd be out quicker and they take more notice of the folks in a private ward."

"Sure they do," he said, "that's only natural. No one's got so much chance when you're in with a whole bunch."

"Do you reckon you could?" She looked up anxiously into his face.

"Sure," he said.

"Oh, say——" she began. He had suddenly put his arms round her and drawn her so close to him that she

was taken by surprise. He was kissing her next, and in between his kisses telling her he would give her as much as she chose to ask for as long as she would give as much back to him. He'd waited ever since the time when he had first lent her mother the money. He hadn't really wanted the money back only he guessed that he'd be suspected by Mrs Patterson if he had not taken it. It was the blackness of Catherine's hair and the direct way she had of looking at him that had sent him crazy over her. He wouldn't have hung around waiting half as long for any other woman. He was kissing her all the time he was telling her and making her understand only by degrees what he was really after. She could not believe him. She would not believe him. She loved him. She had loved him for an age. It had kept her happy all this long while thinking that every now and again she would see him walking through the parlour door. But for him they could never have started this little business which had helped them pay debts that would never have been paid otherwise. It had made her mother happy. It had tired her but contented her to know that, bit by bit, they were paying the bills her father had left behind, and on account of it people had looked up to her mother and thought she was the finest woman of any around that part. Perhaps, all along, he had been thinking Catherine had been playing a waiting game as well as himself. Well, he sure had made some big mistake and she'd let him know it. She freed one arm and hit him in the face.

She brought her fist back and hit him again so that he let her go and put his hand to his eye. She had both hands free now and she felt strong—stronger than she had ever felt in her life. She hit and hit him till he was forced to move quickly and without dignity, towards the door. She stood watching him go, crimson—triumphant, her knuckles stinging and swollen. He banged the door and a moment later she heard his auto tear away from the side-walk.

Then she began to realise what had happened. He had been the man she had loved and she hated him. Hated him. She wished she had killed him. To think, when she had made it so plain to him that her mother's life might be in danger, he had thought of himself in that way and what he could get out of her. She felt sick—almost faint. Then the tears began to pour down her cheeks. She could never remember crying in this way before. When her father had died she had shed no tears. He had not made himself sufficiently loved so she did not see the sense in mourning for him. She had wept with her mother upstairs a short time before when they had clung together but her tears had soon dried for the more trouble in life the less you had time to fret about it. They had both of them got busy with the idea of her mother going off to the Hospital. And now here she was, standing in the middle of the parlour crying like a child. It would never do. Her mother might come in at any moment. There was nothing to

it. She would have to go now into the Public ward. Maybe, it wouldn't be so bad as they both imagined. She might be out in a little time and Catherine would look after her and help her to get strong again. She'd go and bathe her face and get on with the bit of washing she had intended doing when Winston had come in. Winston. Oh, Gee, what could she do about him. She'd never see him again. That was certain. One day she'd tell her mother and she reckoned her mother would be relieved to think he'd never be coming near the place again. Maybe, she had seen through him all along and yet had not liked to refuse his offer of help at the time of her father's death.

She began soaping the things in the wash-tub. She reckoned if she got them out on the line she could get up early the next morning and iron them well in time for her mother to take to the Hospital. The operation wouldn't be till the following day, usually people were told to go in the day before, unless it was something which had to be done in a hurry. Anyway, once it was over her mother would be well again and not look as she had been looking all these weeks past. Presently her mother came in. Mrs Amand would sure do anything that was wanted: Catherine only had to let her know. Mrs Patterson looked at Catherine. "Why, Honey," she said, "you haven't been crying again, surely. Why, I feel better about it already. Mrs Amand said the surgeons they've got up at the

Hospital just now are real good and she reckons this time of year there'll be a pretty good bunch in the wards, 't isn't like the winter when the flu is about all over the place. We can't grumble: we haven't been sick this long while, maybe it's all for the best."

Catherine said: "Maybe. I'm just going to wash these things out for you to take to the Hospital, I reckon you'll need them before the week is up."

"You shouldn't worry. Anyone been around?"

"Joseph Martinez, but he didn't hang around for long."

"I reckon he ain't a bad sort."

"Maybe not. You just go and have a rest, I won't be long."

"Sure you ain't fretting, Honey?"

"Well, I reckon I ain't jumping for joy, but that's all right. The time'll go quick and I'll have you back."

"Sure, Honey, and then we'll make up for lost time, eh?"

"Sure."

It was hard to sleep with her mind in a turmoil, not only with the idea of her mother going off to the Hospital but with the knowledge that she would never see Winston Clark again. He had counted to her for quite a while now as the only man she would ever care for. Not that she had ever really entertained any real hope of marrying him, but it was a different thing to wait and accept some fate that came to you gradually to having

it torn from you when you were not in the very least expecting it. She could have borne hearing that he had married another woman better than to think, though he might not wish to marry Catherine, he had had no respect for her in the few years that he had been coming to the café. And to have offered her the insult at such a time when he knew she was worried to death over her mother. Well, maybe in a month's time she would have got over it a bit: she would have plenty to take her mind off him for the next few days. She listened to the Angelus ringing at the Convent around the corner. It was time she got up if she was going to iron those things of her mother's before breakfast. The more she found to do the better. Getting up as quietly as she could she went downstairs. Stepping into the parlour her eye fell on the table on which Winston Clark had sat before she had asked him for his help. Well, he wouldn't be sitting there again in a hurry, that was certain.

Mrs Patterson had not to be at the Hospital before midday, so they had time to get her things together comfortably and see to any customers that happened to come in through the morning, for every dollar just now would be useful. About eleven-thirty they locked the place up and started off to get the tram at the end of the street.

Catherine's knees shook a little as they went up the steps at the Hospital. A little of her optimism slipped

away. Somehow, if her mother had been going to get settled now, right away in a room of her own, she wouldn't feel half as bad about it all. Just for three-fifty a day, and Winston Clark could have let her have it if he'd any decency in him. Gee, what a ———. They waited a moment or two in the bare hall and then were taken along a corridor to the lift. As Catherine was stepping into the lift the nurse, who had taken them along the passage, pulled her back.

"You can't go way up with your mother, you'd better say good-bye here. Maybe, they'll let you see her again this evening: call back later."

Catherine began: "Oh, say—can't I go up jest for a minute?"

"Sorry——"

"I'm all right, Honey, you'd best go back. You go around to Mrs Amand." She hurriedly kissed Catherine. Catherine's throat went dry. She kissed her mother and stepped back from the lift as the porter shut the gate. She watched it ascend up and up, and saw her mother looking down at her, smiling. Well, they didn't consider you, anyway, in this kind of a place. If her mother had had a private room Catherine would have been allowed to go up with her and unpack her grip and put her things away for her. The Probationer, who was going to attend to Mrs Patterson, would have been all over them instead of this one just telling her that she must clear off home like that. She'd give anything to think her mother was going to be as comfortable as

she could be under the circumstances. Supposing it was a real bad operation? However bad her mother felt in the night she would have the ordinary attendance only. Catherine suddenly felt sick with apprehension. If she really cared for her mother—if she had known she was going to feel like this about her going to the Public ward, she would have thought twice before she had slapped Winston's face. Nothing really mattered except that she wanted her mother to be put into a dandy room as the women up town would book if they were sick. Her mother would never have known, and what would it matter to Catherine herself, whether she paid such a price as Winston demanded. She would go right back now and get him on the phone and tell him she hadn't meant to hit out like that. He ought to be pleased, in a sort of a way, she was that kind, and not the easy sort, if he was going to get her in the end. She would make up to him if only he would come around to her. Only would he go and fix up first for her mother to be put into a real swell room at the Hospital, he could rely on Catherine in keeping her word.

She went down the corridor they had gone along only a few minutes before. Her footsteps sounded harsh and noisy on the tiles. There was a smell of disinfectant everywhere which made her feel sick. She thought of her mother ascending in the lift, looking down, smiling at her as she disappeared out of sight. Oh, well, it wouldn't be long before Winston phoned and told them to fix up about the room. Gee, wouldn't her mother be

relieved. She'd take it that Winston had had it done on his own when he had been told about the operation. She would never know what a skunk he really was. And after a bit, maybe, he'd get tired of Catherine and she could forget about him in time. Anything was worth her mother's comfort.

She jumped off the tram before it had quite stopped and was nearly thrown on her face. The conductor shouted at her but she never even looked back. She hardly stopped running till she came to the café. Someone had been standing at the door and, finding it locked, was just turning away when she called out. It was Joseph Martinez. When she got close to him he told her he had met someone who had been around at the café that morning and had told him that Mrs Patterson was sick.

Catherine said: "Sure, I've jest taken her to the Hospital." She took the key out of her purse and unlocked the door. She was thinking: 'I can't get that message through to Winston with Joseph hanging around.'

Joseph Martinez followed her into the parlour. She turned to him. He said: "I came around: I wondered whether there was anything I could do. I reckon she must have felt mighty bad going off like that."

He was fingering his hat as though he was on edge and looking at Catherine as though he was really perturbed. In spite of her refusing to marry him the evening before he had, obviously, not been drinking, as she supposed

he might have done. It seemed as though something had sent him along just at that moment: she could not have believed that the sight of him could bring her the relief and assurance that it had brought. She would let Winston go his own way. Here was a better way, a way which would teach Winston a lesson, for as another man's wife Winston could not hope that she would ever give into him. She leant towards Joseph Martinez and said, suddenly: "Joseph, if you pay the money for Momma to be put in a private room at the Hospital, I'll marry you right away."

He stopped fingering his hat and stood still, looking at her. He said nothing for a moment or two and did not attempt to go any nearer to her. Then he nodded: "Sure, I'll pay." He smiled then as if he had only just realised that she had promised to marry him.

She said: "Right away, Joseph?"

"Sure," he said, "right away."

"Would you come back to the Hospital right now and we can fix up about it."

He nodded again. "Sure, I'll come right away."

He put on his hat and gave a hitch to his trousers as though to assure Catherine how ready he was to be off. He did not attempt to kiss her or make any overture to her of any sort, and she thought: "Well, I guess he's real considerate, I needn't have been so scared of him all this time. Momma always said he ain't so bad." They slipped out of the café and Catherine

locked the door after them. They did not speak till they got into the tram and then Catherine said: "Gee, I guess Momma'll be that pleased." She hardly thought of the promise she had given to Joseph Martinez. She only thought of getting back to the Hospital and booking a room for her mother. When they arrived at the Hospital they were told that Mrs Patterson would not, just then, be allowed to be moved into a room, as she was going through an examination, but probably after the operation she would be taken to it. The Sister they saw was good-humoured and assured them how much better it would be for Mrs Patterson. It wouldn't be much good Catherine coming round again: they were not sure what time the operation might take place. They would phone to her if she was needed, and in the meantime she was to keep up a smile. Catherine said: "Sure, it's easy to smile now she's going to have a swell room all to herself."

When they got back to the café Catherine turned to Joseph. "See here, Joseph," she said. "I reckon I'd like to be alone till after it's over tomorrow and then you can come around and fix things up as soon as you please."

"Sure," he said, "there ain't no hurry, so long as it's in a week or two."

She watched him as he walked away from her down the street. She was still feeling elated at the idea of her mother having all she needed now in the way of

comfort, and if Joseph Martinez' retreating figure filled her at all with misgiving she would soon put a stop to it. She unlocked the door and went into the café. It seemed quiet, for it had never been shut up like this before; even on a Sunday morning they were busy giving breakfasts to people who came in from the country round to attend Mass at the church near by. Now that she had come back someone would be sure to look around and ask how she was getting on. She didn't want to stop and think, because she did not want the thought of Joseph Martinez in her mind. She remembered once having been tempted to give a big price for a dress, more than she could afford, and the sinking sensation it gave her to think of it afterwards when she considered the dress might not have been worth the money. What would her mother say when she broke the news to her. Catherine might have to admit Winston's behaviour had prompted her to get Joseph's money while she could. She could not back out of it now, not unless her mother got hold of the money and bought her back. The idea of this was a relief, though she knew at the bottom of her heart Joseph would not give her up without a struggle. A few people began to come into the café, and they were all sympathetic about Mrs Patterson and offered to do anything for Catherine that they could. She felt inclined to tell them that she'd done about as much as she'd ever get asked to do in this life, and no one could undo or unmake her promise to Martinez.

She lay down on the bed in her clothes, for she wondered how early in the morning the operation would take place, and how soon after it they would telephone through to her. Any cart passing along the street seemed to make double the noise it did ordinarily, because she was keyed up to a pitch waiting for the phone bell to ring. Anyway in a few hours now it would be all over, and she would know her mother had come through the operation. It was nine o'clock before the bell rang. She had the receiver off and was holding her breath, listening.

"Miss Patterson?"

"Sure——"

"Hospital speaking. Will you come around, please, right away——"

"Sure. Say, can you tell me how Momma is——?"

"Come right away."

It only took a moment to get her hat and she was outside on the side-walk. There was a car coming towards her up the street. She beckoned to the man who was driving. He pulled up a few yards down and Catherine ran along to him. "Say, I've had a call to hurry to the Hospital—my Momma has had an operation and I reckon she must be bad."

The man squirmed the gum he was chewing round to the side of his mouth. "Get right in, I'll take you along." He leant over the side of the auto and gave the handle a twist. Catherine hopped in and gave the door a bang to. "Which way?" he asked. She told him. "Sure," he said, "I know."

He drove recklessly, past the tram-cars and across the lines, until they drew up outside the Hospital. Catherine, who had not spoken the whole time they had driven along, turned now to the man beside her. "Well," she said, "if you ain't the kindest man——"

"Sure," he said, "that ain't nothin'."

Catherine jumped out and banged the door. She leant over the side and held out her hand. "Thank *you*," she said, and nodded to him. Then she turned and ran up the steps to the great door at the top. A porter opened it before she had time to ring. "Room forty-five," she said, breathlessly, "it's urgent."

The porter pointed to a seat. "Wait there," he said. "I reckon the Matron will see you in haff a moment."

She sat down on the seat and waited, looking round to see if there was a soul to whom she could ask the way to room forty-five. The smell of the disinfectant was nauseating. She never could stand for it. A Probationer came along the corridor from across the hall and Catherine made a move and stood up, but the Probationer walked swiftly into the big parlour, where visitors generally waited, and after a moment emerged again and went across the hall and back down the corridor. Why didn't somebody come? A long, loud electric bell sounded urgently. The porter opened the front door and let in somebody from outside. Now the Probationer was coming down the corridor again. This time she came in Catherine's direction and Catherine jumped up from her seat.

"Mrs Patterson's daughter?"

"Sure——"

"Come along here, will you?"

They both walked quickly down the corridor to a small parlour at the end, and the Probationer asked her to sit down and the Matron would be along in a minute.

"Momma——" began Catherine.

"Matron's coming right now."

The Probationer held the door open for the Matron and then shut it as the Matron walked into the parlour. She took Catherine's hand and told her to sit down.

"Couldn't you tell me right away how Momma is—I've been so scared."

Another loud electric bell sounded, though farther away now. Gee! What a start they gave you, these bells that rang out like that when you weren't expecting them. Her heart was pounding now and the smell of the disinfectant seemed so strong in her nostrils she felt she was going to be sick. Then she was suddenly aware of the Matron saying to her: "We are so sorry to have to tell you your poor Momma went out while she was under the chloroform. Her heart must have been weaker than they anticipated. Had she ever suffered with her heart?"

Catherine was staring at the Matron. "Your poor Momma went out—your poor Momma went out."

She looked up piteously at the Matron. "What did you say?" she asked. Maybe she had made a mistake.

"When they were half-way through with the operation she went under."

"She died?"

The Matron nodded. She took hold of Catherine's arm and urged her to sit down on the chair.

"I don't want to sit down," Catherine said. "I want to see the Doc that operated. I reckon he didn't know his job." She began to sob hysterically. "I reckon he thought she was only a patient in the Public ward and I'd seen to it that she was to be given a swell room."

The Matron said: "It wouldn't have made any difference what ward or what room she was in: she was worn out. Had she been working hard?"

"Working hard? I reckon you've never seen any one work same as Momma worked, you ask—down our way." She began to cry suddenly at the memory of her mother working away in the café and then, as suddenly, stopped. "Can I see the Doc?"

"He's operating on another case presently; maybe he'll go around to you later on."

Catherine stood up. "Maybe," she said. "I reckon there's nothing to do but to go home."

The Matron said: "I'm real sorry for you."

She opened the door for Catherine, and as Catherine went out the Matron laid her hand on Catherine's shoulder.

"You're a real brave girl," she said.

Catherine choked. "I reckon," she said, "that won't bring Momma back."

They went down the corridor, but now Catherine neither heard the bells, if any were ringing, or smelt the disinfectant. She felt dead herself. As though she had no feeling and no actual consciousness. She thought: 'When I get out of this crazy place I shall know I've been dreaming. It ain't true that Momma's dead. It can't be true.'

The porter was holding the door open for her and the Matron was holding her hand saying good-bye to her and telling her that they were all real sorry for her. Then the door was shut and she was standing at the top of the steps. The tram-cars were rushing past down the street. Autos were scurrying too, worming their way in and out of each other across the lines. The stop for the tram-car was a little way down the street and she wondered how she was going to walk as far. She began to go down the steps and found that her legs moved easier than she thought they would have. Out on the side-walk she paused and looked up at the building. Her mother was somewhere in there. Fancy any human being, even if he is a doctor, having the power to give a cut with a knife and send you away from the people you love. Gee, they ought to have a taste of it themselves. How powerless her mother had been. Laid out on a table and never allowed to get off it again alive. Carried off somewhere—dead, so that even Catherine would never see or speak to her again. She turned away. She felt she would wake up and find it had all been a hideous nightmare. She must get back. Maybe if she could have

a good cry she'd feel more sensible: not this dead, dreamy kinder feeling. She'd get home to the café. She found herself standing waiting for the tram-car almost without realising she had walked as far as the stop.

She walked down the street with her eyes on the ground and did not see until she had reached the door of the café that Joseph Martinez was standing outside. She opened the door without speaking to him and held it open for him to go in with her. She went to one of the chairs in the parlour and sat down in it. She looked up at Joseph and said: "It's been for nothing, Joseph, me saying I'd marry you if you gave me the money for a room for Momma: I reckon she never saw the inside of it; they say she died on the operating table."

He stood looking at her as though her news did not affect him in the very least, and yet she was conscious of him waiting there for something. She looked up at him. "Joseph," she said, "I said I'd marry you and I'll sure keep my promise, but I reckon I can't talk jest now. I want to be alone. Mrs Amand will be around sometime soon: she said she'd come——" Still Joseph said nothing but stood looking at her as though she had been talking all the while of ordinary events. She noticed suddenly that he had not even taken off his hat, and this had always been a thing her mother had insisted on, whatever the men did elsewhere. When they were in the café they had to make a pretence of manners, even if they did not understand why.

*Catherine felt if he stood there any longer like that, making no effort to say a word of sympathy, she'd scream. Then she heard someone open the door. It was Mrs Amand.

"Oh, say," she began, "I didn't think you'd get back from the Hospital so soon, Catherine. How's your Momma?"

She went towards Catherine, glancing at Joseph and wondering what on earth he was doing there at that hour. Catherine looked up at her. "Mrs Amand," she said, "I reckon you don't guess what I've got to tell you."

Her dry eyes and the blank look on her face stopped Mrs Amand from saying anything for the moment. Then she said: "She ain't——?"

Catherine nodded. Mrs Amand put her hand down on Catherine's shoulder. "Oh, Gee, Catherine, I jest can't believe that." She turned to Joseph Martinez. "Were you at the Hospital?" He shook his head.

Mrs Amand speaking to him seemed to remind Catherine that he was still standing there. "Joseph," she said, "I reckon you can leave me with Mrs Amand. If you come around some time tomorrow—you'll be coming to the funeral?"

He suddenly lost his silence and reserve, and told Catherine at length that as his money would not now be wanted for a room, he was willing to let her have the money for the funeral expenses: he reckoned she would not do things too expensively, not that he was not

willing to pay for anything she thought was necessary, and after the funeral he would give her any money she needed for clothes and other things she might need to take out to his place. He would go to the bank and leave the money for her that afternoon. As he spoke it seemed as though he combined a certain liberality with an extraordinary parsimoniousness. It pleased him to let her know that he had the money, and quite a deal of it, in the bank, but he preferred to keep it there so that he could brag about it when he so pleased. He looked at Mrs Amand and nodded to her without smiling and then said good-bye to Catherine. He hitched his trousers up in the way he always did before making his exit.

When he had gone Mrs Amand, who kept her eyes on him as he made his way out, said to Catherine: "For Mercy's sake, what's he think he's doing, gassing like that?"

"I've promised to marry him, Mrs Amand."

"Marry Joseph Martinez? Why, he's cracked."

"I can't help that, Mrs Amand. He said he'd let me have the money for a room for Momma at the Hospital if I married him. I reckon I didn't stop to think yesterday. The thought of Momma and all the difference it would make to her."

She started to cry now, and Mrs Amand knelt down by her and put her arms round her. Catherine went on: "They said she was worn out with all the work—she died under the chloroform. It jest seems too cruel."

Mrs Amand said: "Whatever's happened, you can't marry Martinez."

"I promised and I can't break my promise. I reckon it won't be too bad. Maybe I can come and see you whenever I come into the town. Oh, Gee, I guess I feel like jumping off the wharf."

"Don't talk like that, Honey. A girl like you has got a lot to live for, when you make up your mind to cut that Martinez out of your map."

"It's no good, I got to do it now I've promised."

She began to dry her eyes and looked up and smiled at Mrs Amand. "Well," she said, "I reckon I'll have a heap of a time to cry when I get out to his place. I'd better get a move on and forget some of the trouble that's in store."

She got up from her chair. "Mrs Amand," she said, "what would Momma say if she knew you'd been here quite a while and I never so much as thought as to make you a cup of tea." She began, from habit, to tie an apron round her waist. Her mother's apron fell off the peg on to the floor and Catherine picked it up and held it to her face. It smelt of the soap with which it had been washed, for her mother had always been lavish with the soap. Catherine hung the apron up again behind the door and, as she looked at it hanging there, she felt that, once again, it had all been a nightmare, and she would wake up presently and hear her mother call out to her from upstairs.

She filled the kettle and put it on the gas-ring in the

kitchen. Whichever way she turned there were things to remind her of her mother. She reckoned she was glad, in spite of Mrs Amand's opposition, that she was going away from this place. The country was fine all along by the river, she'd driven that way once with her father when he had been alive, and her mother had said at the time she wouldn't mind living along by the river. The snow melted quicker than it did in the town, and you could see the steamers as they came up filled with folks from the old country. She would soon get accustomed to Joseph's ways, and every time she felt like getting the hump she'd remember she'd done her best for her mother, even if it had not been any use. Yes, the quicker she got away from here the better, though she knew that as long as she lived she'd feel her Momma around somewhere near: she could not believe she'd gone right away. The kettle was boiling now and she reached for the tea-caddy from the shelf. She'd have a cup of tea too with Mrs Amand and make her feel at home. Mrs Amand had been the one woman her mother had had a real fondness for, and she knew that in the future if she ever wanted a friend, Mrs Amand would stand her in good stead.

"Say, Mrs Amand," she called, "do you take sugar?"

CHAPTER II

THEY drove for an hour before either of them spoke to the other. Then the buggy—it was an ancient rather elaborate buggy which Martinez had once picked up in the market—gave a dip into a rut, and some saucepans which were tied at the back rattled together. They both looked round. Catherine was glad of an excuse, if it could be called an excuse, to smile at Joseph, for it was only since they started an hour before that she realised how seldom he smiled. She had been accustomed to hearing her mother laugh at all hours of the day, and she had always found that people joked readily as they drank either their tea or their coffee as they sat in the parlour. Now, though the depression of her mother's funeral was still in her mind, she longed to be given a smile to remind her that life could contain some sort of happiness for her yet. The saucepans were safe, so Joseph turned round once more and gave the reins a flick on the horse's back. The buggy first dipped one side and then the other, almost as though they were in a boat crossing the river. Places here and there where the track was rough Joseph would pull the reins and skirt round the stones, after a while returning to the track again. Mile upon mile they drove without speaking. Catherine's back began to ache with the unaccustomed

position of sitting in the narrow seat, the cushion worn down to one side so that she had to lean a little towards Martinez to prevent herself from sliding right to one side. She had turned sometimes and watched Quebec as it got left farther and farther behind them. The many spires of the churches stood out and the towers of the Basilica. She had never moved far enough away before to view it at a distance, had had so little time ever to explore the parts that were noted for their beauty and their quaintness. A sight that had always given her mother pleasure had been the long lines of children from the Orphanage, piloted by the nuns on a fête day, along the side-walks, dressed in white, the girls with a blue ribbon tied across them and the boys with a red. She would miss the cobbled streets in the older parts which had always seemed too noisy when a cart was driven over them. The wheels of the buggy in which they were driving made no noise on the earth of the track, but the buggy itself creaked and groaned as though it were parched for a drop of oil. She could imagine Joseph Martinez driving to and from the town for interminable years without dreaming of oiling the springs or giving the buggy a coat of paint. He would never dream of freshening a thing that was past its day, she somehow could sense that. She seemed to be learning quite a lot about him in an intuitive kind of a way as she sat, silent, beside him. She guessed his hair must be the sort which grew very quickly for she seldom remembered him when it was not growing over his collar at the

back. And his nails were always long: she doubted whether he ever cut them. His coarse red hands had always made her feel that she wanted to keep away from them. She suddenly pulled herself up thinking of him in this way: she would always have to remember, in the future, that he had been willing to pay for her mother to be made comfortable at the Hospital. She would try and not look at him unless she was bound to. Once they were on the farm he would be out a great deal and she would be left alone, when she could put him out of her mind as long as he kept out of her sight.

At last, having driven up a gradual slope of several hundred yards he pointed to a shack a little farther on. She held her breath and felt at all costs she must turn the horse about and drive, for bare life, back to the town again. Here was his home and hers. The outside was enough; she doubted if the inside could be any worse: she dared not hope that it might be better. There had been practically no track for some time, for Joseph told her there were no other shacks around for three or four miles, and then only small ones, here and there, owned by men who could not even farm. She realised that he had never spoken of neighbours. He had always been so reticent it did not occur to her that he had not spoken of them because there were none. Or, anyway, none of whom to speak.

She asked: "Ain't there any women around anywhere?" He shook his head. He pulled the horse in

and threw the reins over its back. He jumped down and walked stiffly round to the back of the buggy. He did not attempt to help Catherine down, and when she tried to move she found she was so cramped she was unable to do so. She looked round at Joseph, but he was untying the rope that bound the packing-cases together. As he unlodged Catherine's box the saucepans she had brought from the café fell with a clatter on to the ground. She was ready to laugh, but as Joseph did not even raise a smile she caught her breath and thought: "Oh, Gee, can't he say something." She moved one leg first and then the other until she was able to stand up. Then she stepped backwards on to the step and the spoke of the wheel. Again she found she was unable to move, and stood there holding on to the buggy, while Joseph dragged her box along the ground in the direction of the shack. At last she put one foot forward and then the other and moved slowly to the back of the buggy, where she tried to pull the packages which she had tied together from the top of the packing-case. Then she picked the saucepans up off the ground and began to walk slowly to the door of the shack.

Inside, the walls of the shack were of rough timber, hung with skins of sorts, she supposed coyotes which Joseph had shot. Up in one corner there was a huge bed, which had once been a four-poster, with carved pillars, only one of which was left, and that broken off short. The bed was unmade, and there was a dirty glass

on the table. The window was small and had not a curtain over it, so that from where she stood Catherine could see the river winding away in the far distance, wending its way towards the sea. A steamer blew its siren, and she was reminded of the wharves at Quebec, when she had often gone down and watched the Mails as they came into the harbour. At night, she had liked seeing them come in, the portholes full of light, and on the decks the people sometimes dancing, and always seeming so happy and gay. Once, when a friend of her father's had come out from Scotland, they had gone on board to give him a welcome. He had been going on to Montreal. She remembered how lovely Quebec had looked viewed from the deck, lighted up, tier upon tier of lights, she recalled now, until it had been hard to tell which were lights and which were stars.

Joseph had brought everything in now from the buggy and said he was going to take the horse round to the stable at the back of the shack. He saw her looking at the bed and told her it had belonged to his parents and his grandparents before. One freezing night, some years ago, when he had run out of wood, he had sawn the mahogany posts off and burnt them in the stove. He pointed to a chest in the corner, which was so covered with dust it was hard to tell it was different to any of the packing-cases at first, but on closer inspection and a bit of a wipe, which Joseph gave it with a rag he picked up from the floor, Catherine saw that it was oak, and given a polish it would make

quite a handsome piece of furniture. She reckoned that his people had been quite decent folk and that Joseph had allowed himself to come down in the world. Come to think of it, when he troubled to stand upright, instead of stooping as most of the farmers had a way of doing, he had a good figure, and when his hair was cut he looked as well as a lot of the other men she had met. She thought: 'Maybe, I can smarten him up a bit and make him look more of a man.'

He left her, and she heard him going round to the back leading the horse. It was all she could do to prevent herself from sitting on the bed, uninviting though it looked, and crying her heart out. What would her mother have thought if they had known only a few days before that this was to happen to her. She hoped Winston Clark would never hear she'd married Joseph Martinez—not that she supposed that he would be any the wiser if anybody mentioned Joseph's name to him. She hoped she would never see him again. It certainly did not seem likely. She looked round the shack and wondered whether she should start getting any eatables they had brought with them out of the packages. Strange to say, she had begun to feel hungry. She wondered how Joseph got the stove going? She'd sure like a cup of tea, and she guessed the kettle would take a year to boil even when they got the fire lighted. Here was Joseph back again. She asked him how she could find the wood to light the stove.

He said: "What's the idea of the stove?"

She said: "Well, I reckon a cup of tea wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Tea?" He laughed. "When you want it, make it."

Her back was still aching with the drive out, but she thought, however tired she was, she would have to unpack one of the cases and get some of the clean bed-linen out and make the bed. She suddenly felt sick and put her hand to her head and closed her eyes. She was now aware that Joseph was looking at her closely and seeming to notice that she was actually there with him for the first time since they had left Quebec some hours before. The sky was showing red through the window and the inside of the shack was beginning to grow dark. She started untying the rope which was round one of the packing-cases.

Joseph went up and pushing her on one side began to untie the knot. "What's the idea?" he asked.

"I want to make the bed up," she said, "and tidy up a bit." He laughed.

When he had managed to free the box of the rope he left her to lift off the lid and take the things out she needed. She went up to the bed and stripped the dirty sheets off it. She was conscious of Martinez watching her. She kept her back turned towards him as much as she could and felt, tired though she was, she would willingly walk all the miles back to Quebec again or—yes, she was certain that she would prefer, if she had courage to do it, to walk to the river-side, half a mile

distant down the hill, and just go over. Her eyes smarted. She wondered where all her courage had gone to. She thought of the Matron saying to her: "You're a real brave girl." When she had made the bed she started taking out a few of her own things and putting them on the top of another packing-case. She reckoned it would seem queer living in a one-roomed shack like this after the café, which had had two rooms and a box-room upstairs, as well as the kitchen and the parlour below.

While she was stooping over the case she heard the tramping of feet outside and saw the figures of several men passing the window. Martinez rose to his feet. He had been sitting on a chair with his eyes on Catherine all the time she had been taking the things out of the case. She stood up and looked through the doorway. Martinez was giving a welcome to the men outside. He called to Catherine and presented her to them. He was smiling now and looked as though he was more at home and in a happier frame of mind. He was superior looking to any of the men who were standing outside. She nodded to them but did not smile, for she thought that they, perhaps, worked for Martinez and had come round to wish him well on his wedding-day. They were grinning at Catherine until she felt she would like to give them all a hit between the eyes as she had done to Winston Clark. Then Joseph moved back and invited them to come into the shack. He pointed to the available chairs and the packing-cases. They began to sit down and continued looking at Catherine as though

to see her had been their excuse for calling. One of them removed his hat and threw it across the room, so that it fell on to the bed which Catherine had just made. Catherine kept her eyes on it and went over and, picking it up, dropped it on to the packing-case which was nearest to her. The man looked at her and then at the hat and smiled at the man who had sat down beside him. The youngest of them—there were five Catherine saw, now that they had all come into the shack and sat themselves down—was good-looking and obviously of a better class than the others. But Catherine guessed he lived the same kind of life, making a pretence of farming a bit of land out of which he made sufficient to pay for what drink and women he needed. They considered it a risk Joseph marrying like this—and where on earth had he got a girl like Catherine to look at him, let alone marry him—for it meant he would get landed with a large family and though he had made enough in the last few years to have a tolerable bank balance, they could not imagine he would want to spend it on a wife who would now have to work for him, whether she wanted to or not, and any family she might happen to have. Joseph did not sit down at first but stood in front of them and while he began taking out his pipe and bag of tobacco he told them Catherine's mother, who had kept the café where he had always refreshed himself before his long drives back to the farm, had died and left Catherine, so he had taken pity on her and brought her out as his wife. They

looked at Catherine and laughed as though it had been a joke Joseph had told them. She was sitting on the bed, as it was the place which was farthest away from them all, and she nearly started up and told Joseph to hold his tongue or else she would tell them the truth. But she felt too tired and numb with the horror of the shack, realising it was now her home, and unless she broke her word to Martinez she would have to stay here at all costs. When Joseph had filled his pipe he sat down as though prepared to listen to a long tale one of the men was telling the others. Catherine determined to get some tea whether Joseph objected or not. She got up from the bed and asked him where she could find the wood for the fire and the water—the kettle. He sensed the determination in her voice, and getting up from his chair he went behind the stove and found a kettle which held about four quarts. There was a sack of wood by the stove which he tipped up showing her where she could find it if she wanted it. Then he nodded to the young man and jerked his head in the direction of the door. The young man got up and without speaking took the kettle and started going out through the door. Catherine followed him. She guessed he was going for the water and wanted to know where it was to be found. About fifty yards down the hill there was a well and beside it a bucket with a long rope attached to the handle. The young man looked round when he realised Catherine was following him and waited for her. She saw him look back at the shack

before speaking to her. He asked: "Did Joseph send you after me?"

"No," she said, "I reckon I don't have to ask Joseph when I want to walk out of the shack, leastways I shan't."

"You don't mind a beating?"

"Beating? I'd like to see Joseph try. Say, is this where you get the water, well, it's handy anyway, not too far from the shack—the first advantage I've seen about the place yet."

She did not mind the look of this young fellow now that he was away from the others. She asked him his name. He told her it was Orlando Gane. His father had been an Englishman and his mother Spanish. She had come out as an emigrant years before and had been unable, for some reason, to get farther West as she had intended doing. She had been noted for her looks in the town and had suffered for it in consequence. His father had left her when there had been rumours of a gold rush somewhere and had never come back. He smiled as he told Catherine this and added: "Some gold rush." His mother had died—he could only remember her very faintly—and another woman had taken charge of him and brought him up. That was all there was to tell. His English was slightly broken: he had practically no Canadian accent and used very little slang. He picked the bucket up and holding on to the rope let the bucket fall down with a splash into the well. When the bucket was filled he began to pull it

up again. The water splashed about on the ground and ran in little trickles down the hill. Catherine said: "Gee, that looks good, I'd like a wash." She looked towards the shack and then, stooping forward, she cupped her hands and filling them with water out of the bucket she started to wash her face. Orlando laughed and by the time she had swilled her face two or three times he had taken a handkerchief out of his pocket. It looked surprisingly clean and Catherine took it from him and mopped her face. Then she dried her hands and shook out the handkerchief. A little breeze had sprung up and the handkerchief fluttered out like a flag. "That won't hurt any," he said, and took the handkerchief from her and put it back in his pocket. He tipped the bucket up and let the water run down the hill and then let the bucket down into the well again.

Catherine said: "I reckon it'll make the shack like a furnace lighting the stove: it ain't too airy as it is."

"I'll make a fire outside, the kettle will boil quicker so."

"Won't Joseph mind?"

"I don't care if he does: I'll bring the sack of wood out."

"And there's plenty of paper that was round those things I unpacked—Gee, this'll be fine."

They started to go up the hill, and as they neared the shack they saw that Martinez was looking out of the window. He moved away as they entered and stood watching Orlando as he picked up the sack of wood. Catherine looked over at Joseph. "I reckon if I light

the stove it'll make the shack mighty hot, we're going to light a fire outside and boil the kettle there; I shall drop soon unless I can get something to drink." He did not answer her but went over to the nearest man to him and giving him a shove pushed him off the packing-case on which he was sitting and sent him sprawling on to the floor. They all laughed. Catherine had picked up the sack of wood and a box of matches which was on the stove and took them outside. There was a bare place where wood had once been stacked and seeing it Catherine knew that a fire lighted there could not set blaze to the grass anywhere near. There were one or two stones lying in a hole and these Orlando placed in a ring. Catherine went into the shack to fetch the paper. Joseph and one of the other men had pushed the table on one side and had opened a trap-door in the floor. Another man got up from his chair and gave a jump down, and there was a jingle of glass as he did so, which made Joseph cry out as though someone might have been hurt. The man, who was now standing waist-deep in the hole in the floor, began to stoop and grope about with his hands. Presently he produced a bottle in either hand and stood them on the floor. Then he groped with his hands again and brought out two more bottles. Catherine stood still. They were going to make a night of it. She had kept her promise to Martinez and this was all he thought of her. She had thought that perhaps his reserve might have been a curious kind of respect he had for a woman whom he knew was above

his own station, but evidently he did not know the meaning of the word to allow a bunch of dagoes round, her first night there, and entice them to drink with him. She supposed his cups of coffee in their parlour had been a blind, for a man who kept a store of drink such as he kept in that hole in the floor, never drank coffee for pleasure. What was it best to do? Leave them to it and continue making the tea for herself with this Orlando—his name made her laugh all of a sudden. But if she made no stand against this insult Joseph was offering her she would never be able to complain whatever he did. "Say," she said, suddenly and very distinctly, so that Joseph turned with a start in her direction, "it's getting a bit late for that, another evening would do as well, wouldn't it?"

The man who had been handing out the bottles looked up at her. She had spoken so decisively that he began to wonder whether, even with Martinez as her husband, she was not top dog. He looked at Martinez. It would be easy to see at a glance what he was to do. Martinez held out his hand to him and jerked his head, as much as to say, 'get on with your job.' He glanced at Catherine and kept his eyes, fixedly, on her for half a moment. She was suddenly aware of an extreme exhaustion. Outside, Orlando was boiling the kettle. It was evidently useless to talk to Joseph. It would only lead to an unpleasant fight in front of these dagoes, and she was too tired, however indignant she might feel. She went outside again. There was a little column of

smoke rising from the fire and Orlando had placed the kettle on the blaze. She stood and watched him as he tried to balance it securely so that it should not topple over. She did not speak for a moment or so. Then she said: "They've got a deal of booze in there."

Orlando was sticking some twigs under the kettle.

"Sure," he said, without looking up.

"Do they often have a bean-feast like this?"

"Once in a while."

"Is that what you've come for, you and those other guys?"

"Surely."

"I reckon I'll get the tea-pot."

She went once again back into the shack. The men had replaced the table and had put the bottles in front of them on the table. There were no glasses and they were drinking the raw spirit out of the bottles. The smell of it was beginning to fill the room. It mingled with the smell of the men or rather of their shirts, which Catherine reckoned had just about grown on them. They were talking all at the same time and laughing in a coarse way. Up on a shelf she saw the tea-pot. The spout was broken off but she was too tired to unpack any of the things that she had brought from the café. She took the one she saw off the shelf and asked Joseph if he had any canned milk anywhere handy. He pointed to a cupboard fixed up on two brackets in the corner. She opened the door of it and found one. What a crazy night, and what would her

mother have thought of it! What a blessing she would never know what her going had brought to Catherine. She thought of the way she had offered herself to Joseph. It had been said all in a moment. Before she had had time to think. She supposed if she had asked any of the men who had come to the café they would have told her Martinez led this kind of life. How was she to have known? If only he hadn't been standing there when she had returned from the Hospital, she would have phoned to Winston and she could have got away once he had given her the money and got what she had to give in return for it. No one would have been any the wiser, and however broken her heart might have been after her mother's death she would have started life afresh in a new place. But it was no good looking back. She had given her promise and she had to stand by it now. Even if she ran away and went back to Quebec Joseph could follow her and take her back again to this God-forsaken place. When she took the tea-pot outside, the fire had burnt up quickly and the steam had begun to come out of the spout. Orlando looked up and smiled at her. He was holding the kettle on by putting a stick through the handle, and stood so that the smoke would not blow into his face. He was looking hot, and she had not noticed before how blue his eyes were.

She said: "You're handy when it's needed."

"Yes," he said, then shaking his head, "but I don't like work: I'd like to live at the Château Frontenac

always, but that takes money, and I have no money. I shall never have any money, and I want it—I want it very badly.”

“That’s what leads folks into trouble I guess,” Catherine said; “leastways, it has me.”

“Howso?” he asked. “You’ve done nothing bad?”

“Sure, no,” said Catherine; “but that didn’t prevent me from wanting the money mighty badly.”

“You won’t get it out of Martinez.”

“That’s all right,” she said, “I don’t need it now.” She looked at Orlando. “You don’t think I married him because he had a bit of money, do you? Because, if that’s so, you’ve got another guess coming. No, sir, I wanted it in a hurry for somebody else, and ’twasn’t any good in the end, but that’s what you call being done in the eye by Fate, believe me, and nothing else.”

The kettle was boiling hard now and Orlando looked round for the tea-pot. The look of the steaming kettle cheered Catherine up. She handed the tea-pot to Orlando and said: “If I haven’t forgotten the tea, for the Land’s sake, would you believe it?” He laughed at her.

The smell in the shack was indescribable. She had not noticed before that the window would not open as it was nailed up. Joseph looked at her as she entered. His eyes shone and appeared fixed.

“Where’s Lando?” he asked.

“Boiling the kettle. Where do you keep the tea?” She thought: ‘No good asking him for anything. I reckon it won’t take long to take it out of the case

we brought along with us.' "Joseph," she said, "I want the tea we brought out of that case." She kicked the case she was meaning. The man who was sitting on it got up and though the bottle in his hand was half-empty he put it on the table and turned the case round or, anyway, endeavoured to do so. His hands slipped every time he got hold of it so that Catherine told him she could manage. Joseph had taken a large knife out of a drawer and wedging it into the lid of the case wrenched it open. Neither he nor Catherine spoke to the other. When he saw she was able to take what she wanted out of the case he threw the knife on to the table. The air had begun to turn chilly outside, and it was now dark enough for the fire to be giving out quite a little light. Orlando had made the tea and had stood the tea-pot close to the fire. He was putting a stick or two on the flame to keep the fire ablaze. He had lit his pipe and had sat down, Indian-way, facing the fire. Catherine sat down beside him and thought: 'Gee, we look for all the world like some big chief and his squaw sitting here this way. Some chief, Orlando!' The tea tasted good and began to refresh her. She felt no hunger, only thirst and an intolerable weariness. What sort of a night was she to have, she wondered, with those men drinking like that in there. She wondered how long they would go on, and whether Joseph, realising that he was now married, would turn them out before they became incapable of walking home. Orlando watched her as

she drank her tea. When she had finished the first cup he held up the tea-pot and poured out another for her. Then he filled the tea-pot with some more water out of the kettle. He was wondering why Martinez was allowing him to stay out there with this wife of his and not making any show of proprietorship. You had to be on the look-out where Joseph Martinez was concerned. It was a pleasant change sitting here with a pretty woman, though he did not know that he appreciated quite so much the idea that the bottles were being emptied within a stone's throw, and he not giving a hand in the emptying. But it was not any good him starting to drink with the others; he wouldn't be able to stop once he had started. He'd sneak a bottle from Martinez when he made his way home a little later on. Just now he was content to sit beside this girl and watch her drink her tea. It had grown quite dark now. They could see one or two small ships, cargo boats, coming up the river. Their hooting mingled with the noise of the men in the shack. One of them began to sing some song which called forth howls from the others as they tried to join in the chorus. There was a crash of glass once as though one of them had upset a bottle off the table. The fire smouldered and went out. Orlando emptied the leaves out of the tea-pot and rinsed it out with the remainder of the water out of the kettle. Presently he stood up and stretched himself. There was not quite so much noise now coming from the shack. He looked down at Catherine. "Well,"

he said, "you look done in. You'd been wiser if you'd filled up the same as those in there," he jerked his head towards the shack, "it's the only way of forgetting your trouble."

Catherine turned her head towards the shack, then back to Orlando. "Then I guess I'll have to remember mine," she said. She held her hand up to him and he helped her from the ground. She looked as though she were going to fall, and he put his hand out quickly and steadied her on her feet.

He said: "You won't like it much in there."

"I guess I shan't like it much anywhere." She tried to smile but did not succeed. "You live far away?"

"Nearest shack," he said. "Half a mile."

"You were sure kind helping me to make the tea, I shan't forget it in a hurry."

He was standing with his hands on his hips and she noticed how tall he was. He was looking down at her, and it struck her how intently he kept his eyes on her. The other men looked at her in this fixed way and, remembering it, she suddenly shivered. Orlando began to go into the shack. Catherine followed him. He was not aware that she was behind him and she saw him take a look at his companions. Joseph had fallen forward on to the table, his head buried in his arms. The others were lying about the floor. They looked, to Catherine, like the logs that came swirling down the river from the timber camps. She stepped back, and as she did so, she saw Orlando stoop and

opening the trap-door he leant forward, with his head supporting it, and brought out a bottle. Letting the trap-door down again noiselessly, he stood up and hid the bottle under his coat. Catherine had stepped outside again, and when Orlando came out he had no idea that she had seen what he had done. But she felt she could not mind, for he had been thoughtful, and but for him she doubted she would ever have been able to manœuvre making a pot of tea.

"So long," he said; "maybe there's a good time coming."

Catherine laughed. "Some hope," she said.

She watched him as he climbed the incline away from the shack, and her heart sank as his form disappeared in the darkness. She moved to the doorway and stood in it. The smell of the spirit sickened her. If she could get to the roll of blankets which she had put down by the bed without disturbing any of the men, she would get a blanket and sit outside.

She stepped over two of their forms and managed to unstrap the bundle. She took out a coloured rug that her mother had had always over her bed. Catherine was too tired now to allow the memory to revive her trouble in her mind. She stepped back over the men lying on the floor and got outside once again. She wrapped the blanket well round her and sitting on the step she rested her head against the side of the shack. She sat there hour after hour, closing her eyes but unable to sleep. Every now and again she opened her

lids and saw nothing but the darkness around her and heard nothing but the distant barking of a dog on one of the farms some miles away. Suddenly she was aware of the ground in front of her becoming distinguishable: she saw the tufts of grass shivering in the breeze. Then across the river she saw the dawn break and the water turn from dark blue to a silver light. It was sunrise on the St Lawrence, of which she had heard so much, and as she sat there watching it, her hands hugging her knees, she knew she would never forget it.

CHAPTER III

WHENEVER Martinez went into the town he brought back a supply of drink and kept it stored away under the kitchen table beneath the trap-door. Catherine wondered why he was so liberal in sharing it so evenly with the men who lived around. She had almost forgotten, herself, what a dollar bill looked like, for Joseph never gave her any money. Not that it would have been any use, for he refused to take her into Quebec when he went, and it was no use trying to argue with him. She was quite helpless. She dared not ask any of the other men to give her a lift, and even if she had run away and found Mrs Amand or any of her mother's friends, she knew Joseph would search for her and compel her to go back to him. He gave her no reason to get rid of him. Drink was no cause to leave your husband, and there were no other women with whom he could have given her an excuse of infidelity. For the first few weeks she had taken an interest in cleaning up the shack and polishing the old bits of furniture which had belonged to Martinez' people. She put up the curtains that she had brought away from the café and made the place look sufficiently comfortable. But life was a daily grind, a regular toil of hours. For whole days sometimes she did not speak to a soul. She pre-

ferred that to having any of Joseph's friends around, with the exception of Orlando, and his company was a mixture of fear and pleasure. The way he talked in his slightly broken English attracted her. He occasionally brought over a book and when Joseph was not looking he gave it to Catherine, who would put it away in her box and read it the times she was alone. For as long as Joseph was anywhere around he kept her working. She knew why he had married her. He wanted a squaw, though a squaw would not have done all that Catherine did, and perhaps he had known that. He must have noticed the work she put in at the café. She sawed the logs for the stove and drew the water from the well down the hill and carried it back to the shack. When the snow came she found it impossible to carry the bucket up without slipping back as many steps as she took forward and, herself, devised a plan of attaching a rope at the shack and taking it down as far as the well, so that she could pull herself up again, though it meant moving the bucket step by step until she reached the shack. Joseph fetched and took any letters to the post—someone collected them two or three times a week at the farm nearest the town—so she knew it was useless to write to any of the friends she had known in Quebec. Married to a man of her own choice she might have liked the life. The country round was fertile and the views of the river were magnificent. She sat for hours over the hill a little way away from the shack and watched the ships coming up and going

down the river. This she was unable to do in the winter when the river was frozen over. Those months seemed interminable. She was shut in the shack for days on end. Every now and again the other men would come round and have an evening's bout of drinking as they had the first night she had arrived. Orlando came too, but managed so that he drank very little without arousing Joseph's suspicions, and when they were all helpless he would get up and go in search of Catherine. As soon as she discovered he refrained from drinking in order to sit with her outside and not out of respect for her, she became afraid of him. There had been something in the gentle way he had of speaking to her in his broken English that had made her depend on him. The knowledge that he soaked as much as any of the others when he was not at the shack prevented her from putting further trust in him. It seemed as though Joseph was lenient to them, allowing them to be friends and talk together sometimes alone, but Catherine soon saw that if Orlando followed her to the well and carried the bucket up the hill for her, Joseph would be looking out through the window all the time. He abused her shamefully. Sometimes she wondered whether her health and strength would stand it for long. If the life killed her perhaps it would be the best thing that could happen to her. But when she sat watching the dawn breaking over the St Lawrence, she knew that life away from Joseph could be still a wonderful thing. Whatever could it be, she wondered,

that took a body's life and turned it upside down as hers had been turned, all in a day or two. What was it for? And because she was the decent kind that had kept herself from the manœuvrings of a man like Winston Clark. She knew heaps that would have jumped at him, got a deal of money out of him, and not cared what happened after. She was as good as heaps of women that the men in his set married. Once they stepped into different shoes you wouldn't guess where they had walked before. Her people were better than a good many of those who put on swank in the world up Winston's way. But it was not good to think of what she could have had if she had been a bit more like other girls. She would stick it for as long as she could. Joseph had guessed that. He had known that she wouldn't run away unless she became too desperate, and he knew he had only to break her spirit for even desperation to forsake her in her need. He went into Quebec quite often when the summer came round. Before he went he always saw that a gun was ready loaded and standing in a corner nearest the door. And he made a shutter for the window which could be put up inside and fastened across. The first time he had left her alone at night and unprepared, a wind had got up and blown the door open. The latch had apparently become weak. Catherine had sprung out of bed and found that with the fright she was unable to move across to the door to close it, and had sat there, her eyes on the blackness outside until it grew light, terrified

lest someone was waiting to walk into the shack the moment she might relax her vigil. She wondered whether her fear for Orlando was groundless, or whether he was too afraid of Joseph to approach her. Through the whole of the summer he hung round the shack, managing, somehow, to hit off the times when Joseph was at a farm a few miles away. She took care always to tell Joseph, so that he could never blame her for encouraging Orlando. Not that she would not have preferred Orlando to Joseph, but as Joseph's wife she was afraid of Orlando. She knew that to live with him would be infinitely preferable to Joseph. Orlando talked to her about his longing for better things and his inability to earn enough to get him the things he wanted. If he had had the capital he might have been able to start some sort of a business and pay someone to run it for him, but he was incapable of working himself. He had no go, no energy. Perhaps it was his Spanish blood, perhaps his father had been a slacker. He loved women, but he was fastidious, and had not even the money to pick and choose when he went into the town.

Catherine had replied to this statement: "Well, I guess some girls have got something to be thankful for to your poverty. Strikes me you're only worth the ones you get."

It was not often, in these days, she retorted to anybody, but the combined conceit and worthlessness of the man talking to her suddenly made her feel wild. Even his possible fear of Joseph did not prevent him from coming

a bit nearer to her than she felt was safe, and she used to move away from him, letting him know that he had better keep his distance. She knew, from then, he began to hate her. She was sorry, for she knew it had cheered her whenever she had seen him coming over the hill from his shack. She remembered that he had shown her respect and pity the night of her arrival: she believed she could never have stayed and faced the life but for the way he had initiated her into the ways and means of lighting the fire and boiling the kettle. She knew now that he did not feel friendly. Men, leading the lives that these men led, were at the mercy of their own passions. She thought herself too good for him, and yet she had married Martinez. He had yet to learn the reason why?

She began wondering whether it would ever be possible to escape. If she had made a promise to Martinez she had kept it a thousand times over. Every time she looked at the river now she felt it would be better to drown than lead the life she was leading with Martinez. She loathed him now to such an extent that she shivered whenever he went near her. Whenever her teeth chattered, he laughed. He had a habit of moving over to her by inches, stealthily, so that she would back and back away from him until she was standing against the wall. She had soon given up wondering why he had not made love to her in the days when he had come to the café. This was his way of

making love. To work on her feelings until she was powerless with terror to resist him. Who would have thought that a year ago she would have been cowed by a man like Joseph Martinez. She had been sitting in the shack one evening after a long day's work—sawing up wood, carrying up enough water from the well to do the week's washing, in addition to all the other work that Joseph expected her to do. She knew that, however tired she might be, Joseph would soon be in and expect his supper to be ready cooked, so it was no use her sitting there wishing for a few minutes' rest. She wondered what would happen if she sat there and just refused to work any more for him that evening. He couldn't do much more to her than he ever did. She had always known that once she refused to allow herself to be contaminated by his touch, she never could go near him again. It was just actual resistance she never had courage to show, but once she could show it, it might help her to get away from him altogether. The mere idea of this intensified her longing to get away from the shack—from Joseph—from the whole lot of them. The dagoes that came and got soaked night after night with the drink that Joseph brought in from the town. The more she thought about them the more she loathed them—dreaded ever seeing them again. She knew that Orlando came now for the sake of looking at her because she was the only woman around those parts. If only she could get back to the town again, she would never wish to see or speak to a man again.

With the longing to be back in the town talking to a decent woman she was aware of Joseph walking round the shack. He peered in at the window. He knew she hated this, for until she saw that it was him it always gave her a turn. He came in now and stood in the doorway looking at her. She got up from the chair and looked back at him. He was looking pleased with himself. His hair was long and growing well over his collar at the back, but he seemed quite indifferent as to his looks. Though he had been well-groomed and decently dressed he could not have appreciated himself more than he did at this present minute. He took a step nearer to her, and she suddenly called out to him to stay where he was. He stood still — surprised. Before he could move again she said to him: "I'd as soon die as have you come a step nearer to me — keep off." He grinned. She moved a step back, and as she did so he moved a step nearer to her.

She said again: "Did you hear what I said?"

"Sure," he said, "I'm not deaf." But nevertheless he started walking like a cat, creeping towards her. She moved too, farther back until she was right against the wall. The old terror seized her now, but with the terror a courage and determination. She put her hand behind her and felt for the gun. It was just under her hand. She took it up. It was loaded: Joseph himself had taught her how to handle it. Looking at him, she saw he was creeping nearer and nearer her. He paused

for a moment, but began again to move step by step. She seemed conscious of one thing, and that was the way his hair was growing over his collar at the back. She did not wait for him to take another step but raised the gun and fired.

CHAPTER IV

HE fell at once. She stood without breathing as though she expected him to move and show that the noise she had heard a moment before had only been her imagination and that she had not really fired the gun. But now she was conscious of holding it still in her hands and the weight of it seemed intolerable. She moved over to the table and laid it down. She had fired it, there was no mistake about it, and Joseph was lying there—on his face, and a trickle of blood running out of his mouth. Perhaps he was not dead. She knelt down beside him but found she could not touch him. Yet to turn him over and stop the wound up with something—bathe it—might, if he were not already dead, save his life. Should she run for Orlando? The idea of facing anyone after what she had done filled her with fear. She would have to explain what had happened, how and why? Supposing Orlando was not to be found and one of the other men happened to call at the shack and find Joseph? What might they not do to her? For a moment she felt uncertain even of Orlando. His desire for her had made him surly and bad-tempered these last few weeks, and she had not been able to hide how frightened she had been of him. But if she met any of them what was she to tell them? It was no good to tell a string of lies.

She felt dazed and yet, in a way, now that she had begun to think out what she ought to have at the tip of her tongue if any of them came around and caught her there, she was actually thinking clearly. Surely her best plan was to ride into Quebec. If she went straight to the police she could tell them she had had a fierce time out on the farm: that Joseph had threatened her and she had shot him in self-defence. They would believe her. Everyone who had known her would speak up for her. There were heaps, surely, who would verify the sort of man Joseph had been. They would probably think it was good riddance. There wouldn't be much sympathy for Joseph once everyone knew what she had had to put up with out there with him this past year. She looked at him lying motionless and the little trickle of blood which was soaking into the wood of the floor. If only she could get away from the shack she would feel she could leave the whole hideous nightmare of the past year behind her. The relief alone, the idea of her life on the farm being finished made her reel, as though it were too much to believe. She edged round Joseph's body and took her hat and corduroy coat off a peg on the wall and slipped outside closing the door behind her.

Even if anyone saw her riding away they might only think that she was riding somewhere for Joseph. She might get well away before anyone discovered his body, and even then they might suspect somebody other than

herself. They might think Orlando had done it, for they all knew his feeling towards Catherine and towards Joseph in consequence. They would probably laugh if they thought it had been Orlando's work, but if they guessed it had been hers, she certainly wouldn't care to face them alone. She went round to the stable and saddled the horse. Before she led it out of the stable she stepped outside and took a look around to see if anyone was in sight. She could see no one, so she went back into the stable and led the horse outside.

As she cantered away she took one last look behind at the shack. Was it possible that Joseph was lying in there, dead? But supposing he wasn't dead. Even if the police believed her story about shooting him in self-defence they would be sure to ask her if she had turned him over and seen whether she might possibly have done anything for him. And yet, they might not. If it had been Orlando or any of the other men who had shot him she could imagine every little thing seeming important but, somehow, she felt that shooting in self-defence was too definite a reason to query whether she had lost her head and not thought whether he might still be alive after she had fired the gun. She only cantered at first, for if she went at a hard gallop someone might wonder if there was anything wrong up at the shack. But as soon as the shack was out of sight she urged the horse on. She would take the long track around, as going straight ahead she would go too near

the farm where everybody's mail was collected, and she had never been past it since her drive out with Joseph over a year before. How long ago that seemed, and yet a year in Quebec with her mother at the café had gone by in no time. It would be dark when she reached Quebec now. She would have waited anyhow, for she could not have faced the police quarters in daylight. She'd leave the horse at some place where the farmers left theirs and the democrats on market-days. As she rode along, the wind blowing through her hair, she felt the wonder of freedom and a curious exultation. Then she remembered what had brought her her freedom, if freedom it could be called. She must have sensed Joseph half a mile away to have that feeling come over her of revulsion and fear so strong that she had found the strength to do what she had. A recollection of something of the same sort having happened when she had been a child came back into her mind. She remembered a trial that had caused a sensation because the prisoner had been a beautiful Frenchwoman, and Catherine remembered how she had had everybody's sympathy. Women had a bad time on the whole, but when they were up against things people were good to them. The horse was beginning to show signs of fatigue so she walked it for a bit. The sun was setting now and was on a level with her eyes. She looked ahead, and in the distance she saw the spires of Quebec, the smoke rising from the steamers in the docks. A curious lump came in her throat. She had never realised what

Quebec had meant to her. They had lived in Toronto when she had been a child and had moved to Quebec when she had been about six. She could remember the avenues at Toronto and walking under the miles of trees, the shops in Yonge Street and changing out of one tram-car at Bathurst Street to get into one which went up Bloor Street, but she could not remember ever wanting to go back there once they had gone to Quebec. How strange to be riding like this all alone without a living soul near her. Looking back over the past year or longer she could remember Orlando had been the only person besides Joseph to whom she had talked, for she had only spoken to any of the other men if they had happened to speak to her. She did not know that she was anxious to talk to people ever again. She would hardly know what to say to them. Even with Mrs Amand she would feel a bit awkward, for she certainly would not wish her to know what her life had been like out on the farm. The things she would have to tell her were not fit for any woman to hear, that was certain. Now the track looked more like a road, though a rough one at that, and she saw the outlying houses of the town just ahead. If anyone saw her now they would just take it she had come in for a night or two, maybe to stop with a friend. She would call out to them in passing, for it would seem good to be greeting folk again and be greeted by them. She guessed the sight of another woman would make her stare. She might be tempted to go around to Mrs Amand before she went to the

police, and yet she knew she had better not do this. If she wanted to stand square with the police she must get there right away and tell them what had happened. Her heart began to thump now with the knowledge of how near she was getting to giving herself up. She might make it seem as though she was just reporting an accident that had happened, but in reality she was giving herself up. She was passing a stable now in which she knew farmers left their horses for as long as they were in the town. She would call at the house to which it belonged and ask the people if she could leave the mare there until the following morning. Then she remembered she had no money with her, and that this would sound queer, for no one came into the town without money to spend. She'd have to ride to the police quarters. The noise of the town seemed extraordinary after the quiet of the country. At first the sounds of the bells clanging in the dépôt and the tram-cars rushing by made her feel as though an avalanche was falling on her. People were looking at her, for it was a queer hour of the evening for a girl to be riding the streets, in from the country too. Her mare was looking all in; she'd be glad to get to the end of the journey. The sights were beginning to grow familiar again: it was all coming back. Her life with her mother at the café, their optimism that they had felt that things were going to turn out well for them one day. Here was the police-station. She got off the mare and began to lead it through the gate. Her knees were shaking now: she reckoned it

was with her long ride and being so unaccustomed to be in the saddle for so long. Her throat had gone dry at the sight of the police standing in front of her, waiting for her to say what she had come to say.

Seeing her hesitation and obvious agitation, trying as she was to hide it, he asked: "Anything wrong?"

She nodded. "Last year," she began, "I got married to a man called Joseph Martinez."

"Ah—ah."

"He'd got a farm thirty miles out——"

"Is that so?"

"He gave me a pretty rough time—I've stuck it pretty good till today—and I seemed to go kinder crazy——"

"You did?"

"He used to scare me stiff——"

"Now look right here," the police said to her, "what are you trying to tell me?"

Catherine looked up at him. "Well," she said, "I reckon you've got to know. I got a hold of the gun and I—well, I felt so scared I shot him dead."

"Well," said the police, "what do you know about that. Say," he turned round and whistled, "you there——"

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE café usually opened at about eleven-forty-five every morning.

Jim Arundale professed an intensely English spirit by proclaiming his activities thus to the passer-by at such an early hour. If there had ever been a café embellishing Main Street in Elk's Head it had certainly never opened its doors before seven-thirty in the evening.

When Jim had first announced his intention of serving coffee—ten cents a cup—at eleven-forty-five, someone said: "Aw, Gee, I guess that's a bit late."

And Jim had said in almost an English way, though admittedly with a southern drawl: "I guess that's about the time they open up in the Old Country."

His companion hit back: "Aw, Gee, fancy you remembering that now, I guess your memory's fine."

It was finer than anyone in Elk's Head could imagine it to be. There were times, when a little out of sorts and assuredly out of pocket, he would wander by the bank of the Saskatchewan and remember his mother.

This was not often, but just now and again. And he remembered, too, the house he had been born in, and his father, and his grandfather before that. One could not forget a house one had known for twenty-three odd years before one had been kicked out of it. He had

returned to it with quite a gusto, peculiarly his own, after he had been sent down from Oxford. His mother had been waiting for him on the doorstep. That was one of the times he remembered her—now and again.

She had put her arms round him in just the same way and said: "Well, Jimmy dear."

His father had deferred the pleasure of seeing him until he chose to present himself in the library. Jim had been thankful that he had been able to warm himself by the enormous log-fire that burned in the grate before his father had kicked him out to the chilliness of Elk's Head. He was told that the next few years would prove him. Truth, they did. He was also told that he would either sink or swim. He had done both. Sunk and swum; swum and sunk. Metaphorically as well as actually.

The depths of Elk's Head were singularly deep. Jim had gauged them deeper than any. He had more or less sunk a well of immorality all on his own, and by some had been commended for it.

By others he had been recommended to clear out and, moreover, he had been given a certain time to do it in.

He was sorry, for he had become very much attached to Elk's Head. He was not sure whether it would be advisable to move farther East or farther West. The East held the lure of greater respectability, but he was not certain, after all, whether he cared to return to it. He felt at home in Elk's Head. He perhaps regretted that he had made himself so completely at home. He

was musing upon his regret, mouching along by the river-side, when he spied Ed Green's youngster struggling in the water. A good way from the bank, so that it necessitated a lengthy swim before he could be reached.

Moreover, the current of the Saskatchewan was swift at that particular bend, before it rushed under the bridge which attached the north to the south side of Elk's Head. Jim did not hesitate. Of course, in England his non-hesitation would not have counted for anything, but afterwards, when Ed Green's youngster proclaimed that, compared to Jim's dash to the rescue, lightning was a pretty slow thing, it counted for a good deal. Everyone had said how cute it had been for him to have acted so promptly. With a great clarity of mind he had run along the bank sufficiently below the spot where he had seen, by now, the youngster sink, so that by his swimming direct to mid-stream they—as it were—hit it off together, and Jim, seizing the boy under the arms, began to struggle back to the bank. The boy seemed wonderfully alive considering his ducking and sufficiently so to hang on to the bank and pull himself up till he was sitting in safety on a tuft of prairie grass.

Jim, not so alive, was carried back once more into the eddying water. Billy Green watched him with horror as he rolled over and floated away like a gigantic cork, that quite playfully accedes to the requirements of Fate.

He cried: "Aw, Gee, I reckon he's all in." Then began to shout: "Hey, Jim, do a bit of kickin'."

But Jim obeyed no such behest. He still floated like

a cork and quite rapidly now, down the Saskatchewan as though it were with the greatest of pleasure.

Billy began to climb up the bank. Once on the top he began to run. His sopping clothes hindered his pace, so he stopped and pulled off his sweater. He flung it behind him and began to run again, crying to himself as he ran: "Aw, Gee, I reckon he's gone under. I sure wish I could get there in time."

His breath was coming now in a very laboured way. But here was a buggy being driven from the town out to a ranch—maybe forty miles distant. He halloed. The man who was driving spat far and wide of the track before he looked around and pulled in the mare. Billy paused, for he could not shout and run at the same time. He pointed to the river. His agitation carried its weight in his voice, for the mare received a sharp cut across the flanks and soon Billy was looking up in the driver's face and panting: "Jim Arundale—he's in the water; aw, Gee, I reckon he's sure drowned."

The driver literally sprang to the situation. He leaped to the ground, hoisted Billy up in the buggy, told him to drive to the Walkers' bungalow, where they had a phone, and made off to the river's bank.

They got him just a hundred yards west of the bridge. Everyone stood back as he was carried up. Some of the men took off their hats. Many stopped chewing gum. Doc Wilson was on the spot. He asked everyone to stand aside while they laid Jim on the mattress

which had been fetched, and covered him over with blankets.

He took up Jim's hand. He looked at it. What a treat to see a hand like that in Elk's Head. He thought, and did not mean to think satirically: 'Never a day's work——'

He was sorry. He had joined in the outcry that this man should be got rid of. He was a menace to the morality of the town.

Oh, well, seemingly he had got rid of himself.

But he was sorry all the same.

His momentary sorrow was wasted, for through his stethoscope came a faint but regular beating of Jim's heart.

Doc Wilson looked up at the crowd and gave a chuckle. He looked around appreciatively at the bare heads.

He said: "It's all right, boys, put your hats on; he's not dead, not he."

He had saved a life. Public opinion changed its view of him. He was requested to postpone his departure from the town, and live on as a respected citizen. He accepted the invitation with his customary grace of manner.

But before the invitation had been extended to him, Doc Wilson had talked to him long and seriously. He was morally and spiritually overhauled. He showed a most responsive humour through the overhauling. Doc

Wilson found himself laughing at him and with him. What a pity that amusement such as Jim could give should be drowned in the wretchedness of alcohol.

Doc Wilson said to him: "See here, Arundale, do you like lemonade?"

Jim swung a long right leg over the left and answered: "Sure! You kaint beat it."

He had acquired by now the drawl of the southerner, but even with it and a stetson he was typically English.

"How'd it be," suggested Doc Wilson, "if you set up a bar parlour, a kind of café, the sort of thing they have in the Old Country? I'd forward you a bit to set you up."

"Sure," said Jim, "that's a great idea."

The idea grew until it became a fact. It was established at the corner of Main and Forty-ninth Streets. As Jim said: "it was great." It opened up at eleven-forty-five. There was room to place four small tables on the veranda and if anyone chose he could move a table outside on to the plot and the chairs with it. But the veranda was good enough for most, and when the snow was on the ground the tables and the chairs were moved inside to the parlour. There were lemon squashes and sundaes and ice-cream sodas. At first tea in the afternoon only attracted the few, but gradually Elk's Head adopted the habit, and Jim's café became the spot all right for those who chose to place their finger on it. No impropriety was allowed on the premises. No dice, not a card. If you played a game there was no

need for an eyeshade. You looked at and met the countenance of friend or foe; you sucked through your straw and left the place without a stain on your honour.

Jim walked up Main Street now as a man having authority. Had he proclaimed: "I say to this man go and he goeth, come and he cometh," it would not have sounded amiss.

In a way he issued such commands. A youth hailing from Winnipeg assisted him when the café was first started. And he felt his superiority to be great when he might exclaim: "I reckon you can get right alawng with the scrubbing now."

Many youths had succeeded the first. A pal or two occasionally joined up with him, until they went off farther West with more dollar bills than they were entitled to, and left Jim with less to put in the bank.

He thought maybe a woman would be more handy about the place. He did not advertise, but mentioned his requirement to various of his acquaintances.

No one at present responded to his need. He did not greatly care for sweeping the veranda out himself or fitting the rôle of head and only waiter. Still, he supposed, someone would turn up in time.

Quite early one morning he was measuring the coffee into the urn in the kitchen, which led out from the parlour, when he was conscious of someone standing on the veranda. He inquired: "Someone there——?"

He appeared now in the doorway holding the canister

of coffee in his hand and beholding the visitor, said:
"Come right in."

She came in. She looked round the parlour, then at Jim and said: "I reckon you're Mr Arundale."

"Sure."

She continued: "You know Mr Crooks? Well, he told me to come right along to you 'cause he said you wanted someone to kinder help you run this place."

Jim said: "Sure."

She turned red, then pale, then panted a little, as though the effort of self-introduction had been rather a moil and in itself a little exhausting. She left him to get on with it as it were. Jim looked at her. Her hat was pulled down over her eyes, and in order to speak to him she had to tilt her head a little on one side. He took a step away from her and it seemed to dawn on him.

He said: "I don't want a stenographer."

"Sure no, I know that." Then she reminded him:
"You want a woman to kinder help you with things."

Again she looked round the parlour as though making a decision.

He said: "Would you like to have a look around?"

She said: "Sure."

He led the way through into the kitchen. He laughed:
"You could have seen all there is to be seen from the parlour."

"Oh," she condescended, "it's quite a cute little

kitchen, what's wrong with it? The cooker ain't a new model, but who cares?"

"Exactly, who cares?"

He removed the kettle off a gas-ring as it showed signs of boiling over. Then he returned to business. He said: "Have you had any experience?"

She looked at him and hesitated. And then, as though she had turned a consideration over in her mind, she asked: "You mean—in a café?"

"Yes," he said, "have you had any?"

She shook her head.

He asked: "Do you live in Elk's Head?"

"I have for a week."

He asked, more for the sake of interest than curiosity: "And before that?"

"I lived with an aunt in Toronto. I didn't get along very well with her. I saved some money from my last job and came West."

She panted a little as though once again the effort of speaking had exhausted her.

"What wages are you asking?"

For some reason he had become most terribly English.

She said: "Oh, I don't know—I've got to pay for my room. I'll board here, I reckon." Then as if it was her turn to be Inquisitor: "What wages were you offering a month?"

He said: "Twenty dollars."

She laughed: "Gee! My room's fifteen."

He looked thoughtfully at her. As though the look had been an invitation to stop on, she took off her small cloche hat and shook her head. She said: "I reckon this hat gives me a headache."

Her hair had the appearance of being a close-fitting black satin bonnet.

Jim had apparently been thinking while she had been divesting herself of her head-gear. He said: "I guess you ought to find a job where you can live in."

She intervened: "Maybe you could give me a rise later. Summer coming on we'll be doing fine."

She spoke as though she were already a partner in the business. He realised that, if anything, she was pressing her suit, yet showed a certain amount of timidity as though it was too much to hope that he would approve of her. She need not have fretted, for by now his approval of her was steadily growing apace.

He said: "Of course, there are two rooms upstairs."

She suggested: "Let's have a look around."

He led the way into the parlour out through a door and up a narrow staircase. The door of each room on the minute landing was open. Jim pointed to the front room. She took a peep in. She grunted: then smiled up at him. "I reckon you've had a busy morning."

His bed was made; not too neatly, but still it might have been left unmade. In front of the window there was a table, quite obviously a dressing-table, for on it stood a looking-glass, a good deal of the mercury scratched off from the back, and a hairbrush with a

comb stuck into it, placed in front of the looking-glass.

A chair stood with its back to the wall a little way from the bed.

He explained: "I wash down in the kitchen; it isn't exactly like the Astoria."

He took her then into the two little rooms at the back. One was quite a presentable size. He said: "It wouldn't be bad with a stick or two of furniture in it. I could get it on the Hire Purchase at Walton's."

"That would be dandy."

He said: "But you don't know yet whether the place will suit you."

She laughed as if she found his doubtfulness a ridiculous thing. "Why! I'd work round in a place like this in half the time you would."

He now went over to the window, and pulling out a bag of Bull Durham from his pocket, began to roll himself a cigarette. As he licked the wrapper he looked at her, and then as she was looking at him very directly he lowered his eyes so that he could give his attention to rolling his cigarette between his fingers.

Then he became thoughtful. As he struck a match he said: "Heard much about me?"

"No. But I know what fellows are like down East; I reckon they're much the same in the West."

"I've never lived down East, so I kaint say. I reckon a woman that works for me stands a chance of having a word said against her now and again."

She said nothing, thinking maybe this was but a foreword to a further confession; but she looked up at him with an extraordinary air of worldly wisdom. Then, as for a moment he did not continue speaking, she said: "Is that so."

They were both standing by the window, one each side of it. At the back of the house was a bungalow, so over the roof they could see the prairie as it stretched away towards the South. Neither spoke for a few moments, then Jim said, still gazing towards the horizon: "This sure is a Goddam country."

She said: "We hear down East that, when you come West, the prairie kinder gets a hold on you—I don't think."

They both laughed. In the distance they heard the bell clanging in the depôt as the Calgary mail moved on its way. The smell of the coffee came up to them from the kitchen below. Jim said: "I must get a move on. What do you think about coming?"

She seemed to be thinking.

"Live in and twenty dollars a *week*? or month? to start with—try it."

He was speaking quite persuasively now, "And see how we get along."

She nodded: then looking over at the door she went to it and, finding the key on the outside, closed the door. Locked it, unlocked it: locked it and unlocked it again, testing the handle and its security at the same time. Jim laughed. She knew what she was about

then in accepting the situation. They began to move down the stairs, but did not speak until they were once more standing in the parlour. She put on her hat and arranged her hair, so that it lay in a flat duck's tail on either cheek.

Jim determined that she was both prepossessing and prepossessed in spite of her seeming timidity. Though she was Ontario born, there was something in her that brought his Englishness uppermost. He even held out his hand to say good-bye. Then he said: "Say! What's your name, anyway?"

"Catherine——"

She hesitated. He said a little whimsically: "Not of Aragon by any chance?"

"No," she said, seriously, "Patterson, two tees and a capital P."

"Thanks," he said, "I shall remember that."

CHAPTER II

HE had forgotten it was market-day. He must hurry along with the work. Now if he had thought of it he might have kept Catherine and inveigled her into helping him right away. But after all, he wondered, could she work? True, she had spoken with assurance. But then she had seemed anxious to secure the place. He wondered why. A girl like her could get a job almost anywhere. Even though she had had, as she admitted, no experience. And yet it did not seem, now that he looked back on their interview, that she was out for anything.

She had not looked at him archly, but quite directly. And she was not one of these innocents who pretended ineffectively to be the sort of woman they were not. It was no compliment in Elk's Head to be thought a man's mistress, unless, of course, it might be that you had taken Donald Archer's, the rancher's, fancy. Then perhaps a girl might put on airs. For some queer reason she had, on hearing that he needed general help in the café, run along to him to apply for the job without delay. And secured it. Jim took the coffee cups down from the dresser and placed them on a tray prior to taking them into the parlour. He looked forward to the morrow. He supposed she would turn up fairly early and start

in. During his lunch hour he would pop around to Walton's and secure the necessary furniture for her room. He would not start with getting more than was actually necessary. She would not mind that, until perhaps he was able to give her a rise. He began to whistle, for the world had suddenly become a place of interest. Dusting the tables in the parlour, he looked out at the buggies driving by to the market: ranchers and farmers who had driven in from the country round. The great high wheels dipped down into the ruts and seemed to roll the buggies as though over a swelling sea. Dagoes a lot of them, but he had friends amongst the ranchers—their wives were good sorts. They were good customers too, and Wednesday mornings he was usually crowded out. He went to the ice-chest and took out two quart bottles of milk and poured one quart ready into the saucepan. Doc Wilson showed the wisdom of the ages in having placed Jim Arundale in an atmosphere scented with coffee and lemons. Even when other fellows came around from the bars near by, their stinking breath was dispelled by the aroma of coffee. He was interrupted by someone coo-eeing from the road. He looked through the doorway. He removed the milk away from the gas-ring and went outside. He said cheerily: "Hello, Mrs Jackson, you look piled up anyway."

The woman in the buggy reached behind the seat and produced a bundle. Then handed it down to Jim. She said: "Keep that for me until I come around after dinner."

Jim said: "Here, what's up? What about coffee?"

She furrowed her brows. She said: "Have I time? I've enough shopping for a week."

"Shucks," said Jim, "you're not in all that hurry; where's the old man?"

"I don't know; gone up to Willoughby's for sure."

Jim leant up against the side of the buggy.

"Come on in," he persuaded her, "I've got news for you."

She let the reins go.

"Now you've done it," she said; "I've not spoken to a soul but George and that daft fellow Bandy on the ranch for nearly a month. Gee, it's been fierce."

She spoke of the fierceness with great tranquillity, as after all it was part of her life. She began to get down from the buggy. Jim helped her. Standing beside him she was nearly as tall as he was. Her eyes reminded him of a bloodhound's. It would be quite impossible to lie to her. Anyway there would be no need. Nothing could horrify her. She had seen too much; knew too much. She followed him out through the parlour into the kitchen. She exclaimed at once that his kitchen was not as clean as it ought to be. He excused himself.

"I reckon I've been slack this last week."

"My, Jim," she said, "if you start getting slack it will be all up with you."

He nodded: "I thought it was going to be, a night or two ago."

"Oh, say!" She looked distressed. "Business isn't bad, is it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I dunno—I get fed up working the show alone." He suddenly smiled. "But don't you worry now, I'm sure all right. I've got the dandiest help coming in; I shall have all the fellows coming along; we'll do fine."

Martha Jackson said: "For the land's sake, you're not getting married."

He shook his head.

When he told her of Catherine's visit she said: "Well, it sounds daft enough; you want a lad for the rough work and you go and get a lady's maid, or sounds so, anyway. Seems to me as though she's after you, and if that's the case Doc Wilson will come and clear her out."

"I don't think," said Jim, "that anyone could clear Catherine Patterson out of anywhere."

Martha said: "What's her name?"

"Catherine Patterson. Two tees and a capital P."

"Capital B," said Martha.

Jim raised his eyebrows. Martha continued: "You're crazy, I reckon. Well, I must move right along now; I'll be back some time."

It was a good morning. With some of the proceeds Jim paid a deposit on the furniture. He wished he could

indulge in a small white enamel bedstead with a dressing-table to match, but he knew that its purchase would entice from the shop assistant a justified criticism. So he chose as though he were choosing for himself. For the first time in his life he thought that matrimony might be quite a pleasant diversion if it afforded the interest—small though it might be—of choosing furniture. He quite looked forward to its delivery that evening. He would close the café earlier than usual and get it moved in through the back door. He would use the two spare sheets he had, give her the blankets off his own bed and later send to Eaton's, in Winnipeg, for more. And only a night or two ago he had longed for the old days of derelict oblivion. He would have admitted to no one that he had gone as far as to descend the stairs and reach out for his stetson, even to putting it on his head and walking through into the parlour. He had no fear of God, but he lived in a mortal funk of Doc Wilson.

Doc Wilson was of a different breed to anyone else in Elk's Head. A clean breed, only touching anything soiled, when he might have to, with his foot, and then discarding it as a thing to be well forgotten. For Jim Arundale to be seen speaking to Doc Wilson—say standing on the kerb in Main Street, appraised him as a most reputable inhabitant. Certainly there might be other men in Elk's Head who ran straight enough but only because they were fish, and fish out of water at that. But Doc Wilson was no fish. He was a man and

lived cleanly. Jim Arundale envied him. That was if he came to analysing his own nature and compared it to his friend's. As Jim Arundale, reformed and set upon his feet, this side of the parlour door, he could shake the doctor's hand warmly and with entire confidence. But once on the veranda, his stetson on his head, the glare of the Corona shedding its light behind the sheds at the depôt, enticing him irresistibly, he might call to Doc Wilson till the day of doom and nothing would induce him to turn his head in recognition.

So he had wavered standing there in the parlour and he had won. In a sort of a way. He had gone up to his singularly cheerless bedroom. He had lain upon his bed and said aloud: "I'm damned if I stand out again."

It was with genuine content he looked forward to arranging Catherine's room. He regretted it was market-day. Ordinarily till four o'clock in the afternoons he was free. But as it happened, he had time for everything. Martha Jackson returned for her parcel, as she said she would, and decided she would have some tea before she called at the Corona for Jackson. She gave Jim all the pieces of gossip she had picked up here and there from the market and from acquaintances walking down Main Street. There was the Wragg's residence, which had just been built on Forty-third Street, to laugh at. Martha had all the first information from old Healy's son about the hardwood floors—the dance room. Even there was a sunken bath. Jim laughed: "Sure! I'd heard about that." Martha was laughing heartily by now, for

the weariness from the long drive was beginning to wear off and her tea was reviving her. She said: "I reckon old Wragg never saw a lavatory seat before he came into Elk's Head; the prairie was good enough for him. I can remember him when he hadn't a seat to his trousers." She sipped her tea and said: "But young Dolly Wragg's a pretty girl; old Wragg must have been dreaming beautiful dreams that night; old Ma Wragg isn't much to look at."

Jim said: "You wait till you see my Catherine."

"Your Catherine! She'll be your Catherine and somebody else's by the end of the week."

Jim said, and with a certain calmness: "I don't mind betting you my bottom dollar that won't be so."

Martha said: "Oh Shucks, what do you think she is? Head of a purity brigade?"

"Yes," asserted Jim, "head every time."

Martha laughed: "You bet."

He could not be up sufficiently early the following morning. He made his own bed betimes and Catherine's, removing his own blankets to her bed. Then after his breakfast he began to place the chairs in the parlour on the tables and on the top of each other in order that he might sweep. Now that he came to think of it, he did not know how he was going to place the brooms in Catherine's hands and tell her to get on with the job.

Martha had been right in saying that it was a lad he was in need of and not a lady's maid. Never mind, even if she quit at the end of a week, twenty dollars was not too much to pay for a visit which had been a pleasant *divertissement* in itself and which might prove to be a dress rehearsal to a *comédie drame*. Who could tell?

She was standing on the veranda step almost before he realised she was there, a small attaché case in her hand, and a fair sized grip which was placed down beside her by the bell boy from the Corona. She explained: "Ted's my landlady's nephew; he's going to bring my big box later on." She tipped him fifty cents.

Jim became the English host. He said: "It's very nice to see you."

"Sure," she seemed to volley back, "I reckon you're all in."

Her adaptability was astonishing. He had, as she had said, only to wait till she started in. She very soon did. His scrubbing was a weak effort compared to her's. He laughed. He could not help it. He said: "For the land's sake, where did you learn to work?"

She said, without looking up: "Women were born to work."

He was quite willing to do his share all afternoons, and she let him; but if there were any late comers in

the evening, she urged him to sit outside and smoke with them and leave her to the serving. He remonstrated. She then ordered him in quite a peremptory manner and explained: "Those fellows out there—let them see I have come here to work." He understood.

It required prompt attendance to the many who called from the outside for refreshment. But she hurried around until the last squash, the last coffee, was needed. She had hardly given a smile to any, just being ordinarily polite to them with the pleasantness of the Easterner. After a little while most of them went home, until there were but four or five men left sitting round one of the little tables, Jim with them. They had grown quiet, while one who hailed from Montana told them tales, which he hardly expected them to believe but which he guaranteed would amuse them. Jim, sitting with his back to the road and facing the house, was suddenly tempted to stroll in to Catherine, whom he saw flitting about the kitchen. He left the others and went into her.

The cups were washed and hung up on the dresser. The sundae glasses were upon the tray, waiting to be dried. He unhung a cloth from a line suspended from over the gas stove. She was beginning to look a little fagged. She said: "If there's nothing you want doing after this, I reckon I'll go to bed."

Between them the work was finished quickly, and Catherine unbuttoned her apron at the back. She went

in front of the little looking-glass hanging on the wall and straightened her hair. Jim said: "Just come outside and meet those chaps; they've been landing into me for allowing you to work around like this."

She said: "Is that so? I reckon they can mind their own business."

But she went quite willingly outside and stood on the veranda beside him. Before the introductions took place she drew his attention to the sky. It was the ordinary prairie sunset, but few in Elk's Head noticed it even when the horizon might show up cerise against the snow.

Catherine murmured: "Say, that's fine."

Jim wondered to what she was alluding. Then, realising, said: "Sure."

The men had come forward to greet her. They were a little sheepish, excepting the Montana man, who seemed to have a certain amount to say for himself, even to Catherine. Perhaps they were thinking: "Now for the land's sake what induced a smart girl, with an air of indifference towards men in general, to take up doing Jim Arundale's chores for him?" Well, time would show.

They said good night. Twilight had set in by now. Jim and Catherine for a moment longer stood upon the veranda. It began to get a little chilly, at least it seemed so, for Catherine shivered.

Someone came hurriedly walking down the side-walk. He was in a long black cassock and a broad-brimmed hat rolled up at the sides, a cord keeping them in position. To Jim's surprise he found himself being addressed.

"Have you by any chance seen Franky Norris. He hasn't been round here, has he? He's wanted in a hurry at home."

Jim said: "Sure, he was here half a second ago: I'll get him for you."

He made off and left Catherine wondering whether she should remain where she was or take refuge in the house, for the visitor, if such he could be termed, stood outside, glancing in her direction. He made the first move. He went towards her and said: "Are you from the East?"

"Sure——"

"You will find that we in the West are very dependent on each other. We are one great family."

Catherine said nothing in return. Whether this was a great truth he was proclaiming she really could not say. He added to the declaration: "Will you remember that?"

He did not wait for her reply, for Jim was coming back bringing the other man with him.

Frank Norris said: "Sorry you had to send for me, Father; I reckon I ought to have come right home."

The Priest said: "I think the child ought to be baptized tonight."

They moved away together.

Catherine went down the path as though something compelled her to follow them. She stood on the sidewalk and looked after them. Then she came back to Jim. She said: "Who was that?"

Jim said: "Father Austin, the R.C. chap."

CHAPTER III

JIM assured Catherine that he would get up in the morning in order to make a cup of tea. She told him that he might place it outside her door.

She announced to him that she would prefer to get the breakfast. She was accustomed to early hours and was a quick dresser. Her punctuality and method were surprising. She was eager above all things to get her trunk unpacked. When she had done so and invited him into her room, he exclaimed at its altered appearance. One thing, though, he noticed at once. She had not one photograph adorning the walls. He always thought of a woman's room being a regular nest of them.

She had hung up one or two pictures which she told him she had bought in Toronto. She said that by degrees she would save up and buy a chair or two.

She walked across in to his room. She stood, arms akimbo, looking around her. Then said: "I hate to see a room as empty as this; couldn't you manage to get a few more things to put in it?"

He followed her in and viewed the emptiness. He chuckled. "It's sure like a prison cell."

She did not answer. And though very often she was thus given to allowing an assertion to pass by without comment, her silence this time caused him to look down

at her. Her arms had dropped to her side. He repeated: "Don't you think so?"

She looked up at him then as though she thought him a perfect ignoramus. And gave the most sarcastic laugh. She went over to the window and, reaching up as far as her arm would go, said: "You could do with a curtain here; a yard or so of stuff would do. Gee, I wish we had an Eaton's here in this one-horse town."

Jim said: "The catalogue's downstairs; I reckon I know every article they've got in the store."

Catherine looked at him and said: "Is that so?"

In the evening he found her perusing it.

She said: "They've got some dandy casement cloth sixty-five cents a yard."

Jim looked over her shoulder. They both became engrossed, looking at first one thing, then another.

Jim said: "If you could figure out how much it would take for the two windows, we'll send along for some."

She said: "That will be dandy, but I reckon we'd have to have some for the parlour as well."

He agreed. They both got very busy. Jim with searching for a pen and paper, Catherine with fetching her yard measure. When she came down to him she said: "Who'd think those windows were nearly two yards long; the same in my room, only not quite so wide."

She stood beside him while he measured the parlour windows. He could not quite reach, so Catherine fetched a chair, and taking it from her he stood on it. She

handed him the yard measure. She watched his long arm stretch across and heard him say: "One yard, eight inches—two and a half down for the two windows."

He began to calculate. He looked down at her. But his interest was in the curtains. He crossed back into the kitchen where the writing-pad was on the table. He was murmuring: "Two and a half—that's five—ten——"

By the following evening the letter was ready to mail. Catherine said that she would take it along. Outside the Post Office there was an auto noticeable for being of another make than a Ford and also for its colour. Coming out of the doorway was someone, obviously the owner. He stood back and, holding the door open, allowed Catherine to pass through. She nodded her acknowledgement of thanks. When she came out he was sitting in the auto. He raised his hat and leaned forward from behind the steering wheel, obviously wishing to speak to her. She hesitated but did not actually go any nearer towards him. She stood as though she did not mind so much smiling back at him, though he need not expect a further response. But now he was speaking to her. He said: "Would you think it queer if I told you I was Doc Wilson and asked if it's you that's working at present at Jim's café?"

She answered immediately: "Sure, I am." And as though that were quite sufficient evidence for him to deduce any conclusion he might choose to arrive at.

"I see—I know Jim Arundale very well; I shall be driving around that way presently; if you get into the auto I'll give you a lift."

She thought: "For Mercy's sake, what's he getting at." He was opening the door for her: she got in and sat beside him.

They went down Main Street, across the track, bumping over the rails so that he looked at her and said: "Sorry." And then: "I hope you're not comparing our roads with yours in Toronto."

She said: "Who told you I came from Toronto?"

He answered: "I really forget, but I think someone mentioned you came from Toronto."

"They would."

"Toronto's a good place——"

He pulled the auto up close to the side-walk. He lived in one of the Californian bungalows which had recently been built on Second Avenue. He got out of the auto and said to Catherine: "I want you to come in for a while; I shan't keep you long."

She said: "You're mighty friendly for a stranger. I reckon Elk's Head kinder makes people soft."

He said: "I'm glad you find the folks around here are genial."

"Sure," she responded, "you're one large family, aren't you?" She had meant to be sarcastic. He sensed her sarcasm. He said: "Who told you that?"

She said: "Father Someone."

"Father Austin?"

She nodded.

"Where did you meet him?" He was taking her now into his sitting-room.

She said: "At the café," and in a prompt way as much as to say, "Sure, he comes around as often as any."

Doc Wilson now pulled up a chair in front of her and commenced right away as though it were no good beating about the bush: "I suppose you know that you must cut this stunt out of living alone over the café with Jim Arundale?"

She looked at him in a more direct way if possible than he had looked at her when he spoke. She said: "It just happens I'm not living with Jim Arundale. I took the job because it suits me."

He said: "You know quite well I was making no insinuations."

She said: "I know—I reckon you was talking fairly straight."

"Do you happen to know that, but for instance of courage, Jim Arundale would have been kicked out of Elk's Head as an undesirable. I was glad he had the chance of making good, but I don't trust him a yard."

"It don't concern me what you feel about Jim Arundale."

Doc Wilson said: "I am quite prepared to believe that, but it does concern me what you feel about him; had you ever met him before?"

"No, I tell you I came West to get work, and I got it."

"I can find you work any day."

She said seriously: "Gee, you're kind, you are. Jim said a couple of nights ago, 'I reckon Doc Wilson's a topping good sort'; that's what they call your kind in the old country."

She was not speaking as though she meant to be particularly rude. But only as though she were intimating to him that he would gain no reward for his pains in being inquisitive.

"See here," she volunteered, "I can look after myself, don't you worry any."

Doc Wilson said: "We're both wasting breath. There isn't a decent woman who'd live under the same roof as Jim Arundale. If he offered to marry you tomorrow, you'd be in the same position. No decent woman would marry him: as a doctor I should stop the marriage."

Catherine exclaimed: "For Mercy's sake, who's talking of marriage; I'm not, nor nothing else either."

He got up and drawing his chair a little nearer to her he said: "I wish we could see eye to eye; I am not in the least meaning to interfere; you are free to do as you please. You know folk in this town don't gossip: they talk. There's little to talk about, but there's heaps to make you retch."

He pulled her up from her chair, and taking her to the window he stood her in front of him. Placing his hands on her shoulders he said: "Do you see that

house over there—above the cut-banks and then a bit to the left? ”

She knew what he was beginning to get at. She answered: “ Yes, I reckon it stands out quite plain.”

“ You know what it is? ”

She did not answer. He moved her, his hands still on her shoulders, just a step or two farther to the left. Bending down so that his head was on a level with her's, he said: “ I don't know whether you can see the other from here—yes, there it is, that's for the Chinks and Dagoes.”

She said: “ You're some showman.”

Doc Wilson said: “ Ask Jim if he knows those places.”

She turned round angrily then. She cried: “ What are you getting at—what do you think I am? I'd see a man hanged first before he laid a finger on me.”

He said: “ No one at the end of a week will think anything but you're Arundale's mistress, though perhaps they will not do you the honour of calling you his mistress ; that, after all, is quite a refined word in Elk's Head.”

Her anger had now gone: she herself could not have declared to anyone the reason of it's going. For the space of one moment and no longer she was conscious that his hands were still upon her shoulders. She suddenly lifted them off and walked over to the door. Her attitude became one which was demanding in a way of its own an abject apology. If anything it was more than an apology. She was demanding an avowal

from him of homage, an homage earned solely by her very perfection of honour.

She said: "When you can prove that there's someone slinging mud around where I'm concerned I'll quit the café, not before—you understand?"

He said very quietly: "It would take a woman of extraordinary character——"

"Wouldn't it?"

"The only thing left for me to do is to drive you back home." He began to move over to the door as well.

But she shook her head.

She said: "No thanks, I reckon I'll walk."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN she arrived back at the café she found Jim preparing the supper. He looked round, as she went into the kitchen, from where he was standing at the gas stove. In a short time his figure had grown extraordinarily familiar. She thought now, as she watched him turn a fried egg in the pan so that it sizzled in the boiling fat: "Gee, I've seen him standing there at that job a thousand years." He said good naturedly: "You'll get fired next time."

"Sure," she said, "you bet."

She went over to him and tiptoed up so that she could peep over his shoulder and see what he was preparing.

He looked down at her. He said: "We made a good turnover today."

She said: "Did you?"

He answered: "We did."

She began to move away from him. She told him she would just take off her hat. He was looking at her as she went out through the door.

Perhaps she was longer than she had meant to be upstairs, for he had to give her a call, telling her that supper was ready. He had laid it in the parlour. When

she came down he had pulled her chair out from the table ready for her to sit in it. She sat down and arranged herself at the table. He went to sit down himself, opposite to her. He said thoughtfully and as though he had made a most pleasant discovery: "I kaint remember the last time I did that."

"What," she asked.

"What I did for you just then."

She said: "Oh, and do you reckon you're sickening for some disease. Is it a bad sign?"

He said: "I don't know."

They were both silent for a little time and then Jim said: "Martha Jackson will be in tomorrow, you'll sure like her."

Catherine said: "Count your chickens."

Jim said: "She knows a thing or two."

"Sure she does, all women do."

"Don't you like women?"

Catherine said: "Men and women are like the devil and the deep sea; sometimes you don't know which it's worse to go to."

Jim said: "Women every time, don't I know it?"

She said: "Thanks."

He said: "I was not thinking of you, you know that."

She smiled at him and said: "Well, it's pleasant to get a compliment after a snub."

He asked: "Who's been snubbing you?"

She leant towards him and said: "A friend of yours."

"Oh, who? Goddam him anyway, whoever it was."

Catherine laughed: "Doc Wilson."

"The Hell he did. Well, he'll damn well come round and say he's sorry."

Catherine continued: "He says in a week's time Elk's Head will say I'm a ——. Only he was all fussed up and slinging the Daddy talk around."

Jim swore. But Catherine comforted him. She let humour alone and spoke a little seriously.

"'Course he'd got to say something, what do you think?" Then: "What do you think I'm here for? Because I fell in love with you after hearing down town what a lovely fellow you were? No, Sirree. Truth is, I can't stick women, they make me tired."

She looked out of the window, then turned to Jim again. He said: "Suppose he said a nice lot about me?"

Catherine said: "Not so much."

"Git," said Jim, "I reckon he jawed like Hell."

"Oh," said Catherine, "a step higher than that."

She had finished her supper. Jim was helping himself to cheese. His shirt sleeves were rolled up above the elbow. His hands were brown and the sunburn edged over the wrists. His arms were white. Catherine compared them with her own, for she had a short-sleeved dress on. They were brown the whole way up, so that a large vaccination mark showed up plainly. She began to collect the silver-plated forks off the plates and piling the dishes one on the other.

Moving round to the back of his chair she stood still

behind him. Then she said quietly: "I reckon you ain't a marrying man?"

Jim crumbled a piece of bread between his fingers. Looking down at him she saw his mouth twitch.

"Unfortunately not." His voice was very low.

Catherine said: "I reckon there ought to be a line of gallows down the Main Street of every town and all the rotten mothers there dangling from them."

Jim said: "My God! Catherine, there's men that ought to swing."

"Sure," she said, "'cause they've had rotten mothers. Makes me sick all this talk of the mothers being pitied. First one because her boy's gone to Hell. 'Course he has; she's sent him—paid for the ticket as soon as he was born. Then another because the girl's gone and had a baby. Gee! Where did they get their own babies from? that's what I'd like to ask them. Parents talk as though they went about things in a different way." She sneered. "Some conjurors, eh! Sure, Daddy's done the hat trick and it's a boy this time."

Jim began to laugh.

"But all the same I reckon you had a fine home somewhere in the old country. You oughtn't to have done the things you've done. Look at you now, you're only a kid and you're all in."

She saw his mouth had begun to twitch again. And he was crumbling the piece of bread away for all he was worth.

She said: "I didn't come here because I thought

maybe you'd marry me. I thought we'd get on fine and I reckon we do. I'll stay right here as long as you run straight. You gotta get everything else right out of your head. You gotta build the business up and pay Doc Wilson back every dime he handed over to you. I reckon sometime you can sell out and go farther East or farther West. Maybe you could get back to the old country some day."

Jim got up from his chair: hurriedly so that it tipped over and fell to the ground. He walked quickly into the kitchen as though he might have heard something boiling over on the gas stove. Then turned abruptly and came and stood in front of her.

He said: "A year ago decent men wouldn't know me in the street—if I'd had any decency I wouldn't have let you take this job. I reckon Doc Wilson's right. But I kaint let you go."

Catherine assured him: "It's all right, I shan't leave you, not so long as you run straight."

There was no quaver in his voice when he said: "I'll sure run straight, Catherine."

CHAPTER V

It was three weeks and three days since Catherine had started working at the café. Three weeks and three days. Once they had gone by and he had paid that first visit she did not so accurately enumerate either the weeks or the days. Because occasions came when she met him in Main Street. In the evening especially he would be here, there and everywhere, paying his evening visits.

And sometimes now Jim let her off for an hour or so to call on a friend or maybe to go to one of the shops on Main Street. But for three weeks and three days she had more or less stuck to the café, for it had taken a little time to settle the rooms once the casement cloth had come from Winnipeg. She had met Martha. The first day when she had called early to leave some bundle for the time being, Catherine had been up in her room and Jim had stood at the foot of the stairs and called her down. They met in the kitchen. Catherine's first idea of Martha never left her. There were people in the world — people — people and besides them Martha Jackson. In twenty years she had not altered the fashion of wearing her hair, the length of her skirt, or the cut of her coat. She was enriched

only by one thing, and that was a gold crown which replaced the tooth behind the eye tooth. Yet nothing about her seemed threadbare, on account of the richness of her soul and heart as well. Though Jim had picked up the most thorough little wanton, she had been prepared to accept her for what she found her to be.

She said at once to Catherine: "My! You've smartened up Jim's place fine." And she thought: "Why, Jim's picked a peach."

She eyed the curtains and said: "You gotta machine here? You made them all by hand! Say, you're a dandy worker."

She approved of the parlour, still more of the bedrooms. She sat on the bed and asked Catherine whether she had made the acquaintance of such and such a store, and she told her that Brown's was better than Waller's for such and such a thing and that, if she ever got sick, the Hospital was a dandy place and she must steer clear of old Susie Symons because she was an old bitch of a gossip—Gee, she was fierce. No query as to whether Catherine had come from the East or from the West. No inquisition on home, parents or the past. And Catherine was thinking: "Why, Jim knows a real nice woman when he meets one, sure."

Martha spoke of the ranch and the neighbours round. The Phillips. They lived three miles away, the Montana side of the Crag: the Camerons were farther along the

plain, two miles away. The Armstrongs were the nearest to them. Though it didn't take much longer to get to the Garlands. Poor Minty Garland. Poor Minty made you weep salt tears all right. Catherine asked: "For why?"

Martha said: "She's batty." Then she continued: "Not bad, you know; kinder wanders around and somebody's got to go and fetch her home. Gee, wasn't she a peach when she first came out from the old country. She's mighty pretty still. That was five years ago. John Garland's the sort that wants a tonna dynamite to make him get a move on. Oh Gee, ain't that a slow man; he ought never to have come out to this country anyway. He can't tell a load of alfalfa from manure. He's got money of his own. Shouts about it, too, instead of being ashamed he can't make any. The fellows are always saying they'll let a gun off one day when he's taking a walk around. I wonder one of them didn't do it that time he left Minty. Some of them were crazy over her. She hadn't long had the baby and he went into town and left her there all alone. He was to have been gone two days and then fetch the stores back with him and he stayed away a week. The kid was on Nestle's milk 'cause Minty couldn't feed it herself, and it couldn't take cow's milk and she ran out of Nestle's. The fellows won't go to the place at all when Garland's there. It was Bandy first said to me: 'Why, I haven't seen smoke coming out of Garland's chimney two or three days. I reckon something's wrong.'

"Well, it was a real bad day for me to leave, but I just had to go down—their shack's right below us down on the plain, this side of the Montanas. Oh Gee, I shall never forget Minty. She's real swell class, you know, from the old country. Tall, with goldy kinder hair and big blue eyes. She was sitting there in the rocker looking outer the window watching for Garland to bring the stores back. She was rocking the baby backwards and forwards though it wasn't making a sound, and how she'd got the strength to rock at all I don't know. I said to her: 'Why, Minty, your little baby's nearly dead—when did it last have it's bottle?' And she said, 'I don't know, Mrs Jackson.' So I said: 'When did you last have anything to eat, Minty?' and she said, 'I don't remember, Mrs Jackson.' Oh Gee, I don't know which was worse to see, her eyes that day or now that she thinks she's back in the old country. I had to leave her there and go home for some milk and food. But could I get that baby back to life, no Sirree, believe me it had been dead for quite a long time and Minty didn't seem to know.

"She was just too crazed sitting there all in the dark at night. Garland's gotta a woman now that does the chores and looks after Minty. But he'll have to shift her one day to Nettleford. She wanders all over the place looking for the baby. Sometimes they find her seven or eight miles away on the prairie. Garland says, when she was a little girl her folks lived in London and

she was taught to say, 'case she ever got lost, 'I live in Redcliffe Gardens.'” Martha laughed. “Now whenever they find her, first thing she says, doesn't matter who it is, 'I live in Redcliffe Gardens.' The boys always laugh and say, 'Sure you do, Mrs Garland.' You never know when you're going to look up and see Minty standing in your doorway. She's happy as anything, you know, only sometimes she looks kinder puzzled as though she's not quite sure whether you're fibbing or not. She smiles and says, 'Have you seen my baby, Mrs Jackson?' Oh Gee, I'd like to get a gun and get Garland right in the guts.”

The Camerons were farther along the plain, ten miles away. The Armstrongs were nearest to them. Then there was the store kept by old Billy Turnbull, eight miles nearer Elk's Head. Everyone said he was worth a million dollars and he'd been known to have but a dime in his pocket. Sometimes on the ranches they didn't go out for seven weeks on account of the snowdrifts. It was fierce in the winter. But somehow the interest in the cattle kept them going. They often got people to go out from Elk's Head to stay awhile—Catherine must go one day.

Catherine said: “How far is it?”

Martha said: “Forty-seven miles.” As much as to say: “Not far really.”

Catherine said: “Gee.”

So Catherine remembered that it was the third day

of the fourth week that she had met Martha Jackson for the first time. Not that she would have remembered, but the evening before Doc Wilson had called. She had been in the kitchen, and hearing his step on the veranda she had come as far as the doorway and paused there, thinking maybe Jim was around somewhere and would receive the visitor. But instead of asking for Jim he stepped into the parlour and smiled at her.

He said: "I've come to pay my respects."

He pulled a chair away from one of the tables and motioned to her to sit down in it. Then he drew another out and sat down himself.

He said: "I forget, do I owe you apologies or congratulations?"

She said: "Both, I should say; though I'm not a pioneer, I'm carrying on your good work."

"In what way?"

"You started Jim."

Doc Wilson thought: "She has wisdom, she might have said, 'You reformed Jim.'" He said: "It was worth while."

Catherine said: "What was?"

"Giving him or, in fact, anyone a second chance."

"You think so; well, I reckon you ought to know." Then she smiled: "You haven't got any more hanging around, have you?"

He said: "Any more what?"

She said: "Any more second chances; I thought

maybe if I ever needed one myself, I'd know where to come."

He looked at her. She went farther with her jibe.

"Or maybe a third, but I reckon you don't deal with them."

He flushed and looked at her very intently.

He said: "Am I taking up your time or may I light a cigarette?"

"Sure, you laze around for as long as you please; there's no place like the enemy's camp for making yourself at home."

He said quickly: "I am not Arundale's enemy; I thought it was more or less understood that I'd been his friend."

Her good nature came uppermost. "Sure," she said, "you've been real decent to Jim; he knows it. Seems a kinder pity you ain't better friends—he's your sort, you know what I'm getting at. The guys that hang around this place don't give him a chance. I reckon they're all for getting him back to the Corona if he'd a mind to go."

"I see; and has he a mind to go, do you think?"

She shook her head. "Not if I got two hands to pull him back; that is if he ever got on the move, I reckon I'd getta grip on him all right."

"I see, you reckon you've got a grip on him?"

"Ah—ah."

He talked to her for quite a time. And as he talked he noticed she sat with her hands in her lap, the wrists together as though they had been tied thus, the base of her palms just touching.

CHAPTER VI

METAPHORICALLY it had acted as a distant trumpet call. And having blown upon the trumpet he laid it aside, for he had no intentional purpose, when he had walked into the café, of even suggesting a council of war.

Perhaps Catherine did not know that she had pricked up her ears and wondered whether after all she had been mistaken.

Though Jim had seen nothing, he heard of the presence of the trumpeter. Catherine told him about it.

He realised that Catherine must have heard long since that he had been saved from the burning by Doc Wilson. The realisation did not make him happy, though it was egotism and not conscience that made him regret being another man's inferior. It was not pleasant to know that, even should you capture a woman's affections, that woman must know you for what you are and compare you to other men. Men you would resemble if it cost you nothing in moral effort. It seemed that, however completely one seemed to succeed in covering up one's crime, the crime showed up in a very conspicuous way. It might have been the consciousness of inferiority that whipped Jim's jealousy up, so that

momentarily he set his teeth together when Catherine said: "Doc Wilson's been here looking for you."

Then she thought: "I have only told him what I really thought at first, that he'd come around to see Jim."

Jim had been the first to notice that of the hundred and fifty men who hung about the café all the week, none made the slightest impression on Catherine. And many made advances. An advance made by a man in Elk's Head was a quickly moving one. Men did not think how they might go about pleasing a girl; they got right there, or attempted to, anyway, straight off. One might give a liberal five dollar note for his cup of coffee and expect no change, and ask Catherine at the same time, "What about it?"

Catherine gave such no answer, as though anyway their language had been foreign to her and she had not understood. So you could say to a banker: "Why don't you farm?" And the banker would reply with reason and laugh with it: "I know nothing about farming; of course I know you have tractors and spades and a threshing machine, but that's about all."

By standing a little way away from them as she handed them their coffee, she answered them. At least they took it to be: 'nix on the farming stunt, no Sirree.'

But to sit a little way away from Doc Wilson as she had done, or if you came to think of it—they had sat a little way away from each other with the table in between them—was as much as saying: "I know a

little about farming, but that's not saying I'm going to farm."

So when Catherine said in quite an offhand way: "Doc Wilson's been around here," Jim's wits quickened to the fact far more than if he had seen one of the others leaning over the balustrade of the veranda looking up into Catherine's eyes and candidly proclaiming he was all for it.

How often had he heard her retort that they had a bat in the belfry, or she recommend them not to have a hunch that way. If Jim mentally struggled to his feet in order to be on the alert, he thought better of it and for the time being decided to lie low. He became silent. His silence invariably developed into sullenness. Put on with a peculiar little show of his own, rather revelled in and protected from others' dissolution. If he had said 'Is that so?' it would have obliterated the chance of the trumpeter blowing upon the trumpet. But as it was he stood and pulled the bag of Bull Durham out of his pocket with a show of ridiculous irritation.

Had Catherine had any of the vixen in her, their partnership would have been exploded in a moment. Had she possessed the temperament which revels in being the prey of men's jealousies and competitiveness, she could have created then and there a hell for Arundale.

But as soon as she was aware that he resented her having been alone with Doc Wilson, she felt she wanted to reassure him as to the stability of their friendship.

As soon as she saw that he was becoming sullen with

his silence she said in an offhand way: "I reckon he's queer."

Jim said: "He's all over himself, that's all."

So it was allowed to pass. And Catherine was content. She was beginning to stand for something in Elk's Head. She was building up a business much as though she had started it on her own. Debts were being paid that had long been left unpaid. When old Pete Sullivan died and left a widow without a cent, Jim stumped up a sum the same as others. His generosity reflected on Catherine's influence. There was never a button off his shirt nor a speck on his collar. This, everyone knew, was due to Catherine's energy. People had even ceased to wonder when the trouble would begin. They knew that if it ever did Catherine would quit the café. In Elk's Head it was an accepted fact that women were not out for anything. Perhaps it was that there was precious little to be got.

The women who married and went out to the ranches gave their lives to the men who had picked them out—and to the prairie. The prairie, as it were, swallowed them up. Perhaps after all they were the luckier, for the women who stayed behind in the towns gave more than their lives. They did not somehow stand out bold and clear, like the women on the prairie. They looked on the woman who was still earning her wage as an enviable being. In their hearts they pitied her, for her day was yet to come.

Eventually she would be persuaded to give up her

liberty and join up with a would-be destroyer—it might be of the joy in life, the optimism of youth, or the romance of purity. There was so much to be slain and always a ready slaughterer.

So perhaps it appeared to many that Catherine, in keeping Jim Arundale and any other at a distance, was hugging to herself for as long as she might a security and superiority which should never be wrested from her. Not if she could help it. She stood on firm ground. Sure! Who could doubt it? Jim was reminded of this every night when she went up to bed. Occasionally he laughed as he had the first time he had watched her go to the door and test the latch. Albeit, recently when he had heard her turn the key in the lock, a little strange unhappiness entered into his being.

Every night now he was deeply conscious of her turning the key in the lock. But he was like a sentry who, finding his lids are inclined to close, blinks and shakes his head, for such an allurement must not be indulged in. He could have sworn Catherine's words, 'I reckon he's queer,' had abolished his little rise of temper. He persuaded himself that he was being perfectly genuine in thinking so. But then after supper came the little teasing query as to whether Doc Wilson had in reality paid his visit to himself or to Catherine. He wished he knew. He wished to God he knew. Why not go round and find out? It would seem natural. But he did not feel inclined to go just then. It was pleasant to sit there in the parlour and smoke

and listen to Catherine putting things straight in the kitchen. She was ironing some things of his. He heard the thump—thump of the iron as she dabbed it down on the board, smoothing it along some garment or other. He was tempted to go in and watch her for a moment or two. A shirt of his lay flat upon the ironing board ; the sleeves hung down each side in limp fashion. She picked one up and pressed the iron down on the cuff so that the steam rose. He said: " You shouldn't worry with the washing ; why don't you send it along to the Chinks? "

She answered: " I found this one after it had come back from the laundry and I reckon it's all in."

For a moment he said nothing more. She worked around as though he were not standing there leaning up against the door. Presently he reached for his stetson and going out made off up the street.

He cut across the prairie until he reached the river. Then continued on his way. Thinking, until he felt there was no other force besides thought in his mind. He did not know whether it was of his own accord he brought the figure of his father prominently before him. His father. How well he remembered his father's last tirade. He kept the figure of his father mentally before so that he could relieve himself by having shots at him as it were.

They were the shots he had had before standing

in the library that fateful day when he had returned from Oxford. He heard his father's voice: "I've paid your bills here, there and everywhere——"

And Jim had shouted back: "I know—I know. You paid to a man whose hirelings robbed me of decency when I was fifteen. I told you about it and you didn't take me away. You told me, as you told me later, that one sunk or swum of one's own accord and not because others held out a hand or dragged one down."

And his mother. Oh God; how could one blame one's mother. And yet what was it that Catherine had once said about mothers deserving the gallows. How often had he been choked in misery as a boy—as a youth when his nature had been like a madness intolerable to bear and his mother had rested her hands on his shoulders and said: "Well, Jimmie dear." Oh damn, he did not want to be faithless to his mother's memory.

He sat down by the riverside. The cut-banks were reflected in the water and looked mis-shapen and crooked because the current was so strong. He wondered whether there was any way out. Whether, if he went on keeping straight for a good long time, he could marry. He had had no desire to drink since he had taken up this coffee business. True he kept away from it, never smelt it, but even to have the strength to stay away from the smell showed what he could do if he chose. But he knew he was only willing the hope to

rise in him. It was no good. Literally no good. He was merely a puppet acting a part. He was filling the rôle of a respectable citizen of the town and he had once forfeited the right to being thought any such thing. Saving a life did not give back to women the virginity he had robbed them of. He wondered whether a man given the choice would prefer to let a boy's body sink in the river or push a woman's soul down to Hell. He would ask Catherine. Catherine again. Lord, what a muddle. He'd get back now—walk around by the water works. Anyway the walk had done him good. That had been one of the things Doc Wilson had told him to do, walk the soles off his feet. Doc Wilson. Supposing he ever tried to capture Catherine. Jim laughed. He thought: "I sure would put a bullet through his damned brain first."

CHAPTER VII

ON a market-day in June, early in the morning just as Jim and Catherine sat down to breakfast, they heard Martha's voice calling to them from where she sat in the buggy out in the road.

Jim at first got up slowly and went into the parlour. He thought maybe that Martha was leaving a message before going on to the market. It was not the buggy after all that Martha was driving but one of the carts from the ranch. She called to him: "Jim, give us a hand. . . . I've got Nettie Armstrong here and I don't know whether I'll get her to the Hospital in time; the baby's on the way."

Jim looked at the Armstrong woman. She was lying curled up in the back of the cart. Quite still and very white. She was moaning, and Jim saw that her fingers were working as though she were playing on an imaginary piano.

He said: "What had we better do?"

Martha's brow was contracted. She said: "Oh Gee, I think we had best get her into your place; it would be cruel driving her across the track." Then thinking: "I don't know, I think I'll risk it. Get

Catherine to come and sit behind so as to keep Nettie's head from bumping."

Jim called to Catherine. Martha climbed up once more, ready to move on. Jim lifted Catherine up and she sat crossed-legged, supporting Nettie's head in her lap. Martha drove as quickly as she dared.

Catherine leant forward and kissed Nettie's cheek. She said: "Don't you worry, I got you safe." And thought: "Oh Gee, how do they stand it."

It somehow seemed to her all for nothing. From their life on the prairie there came no reward. It was something more than hardship. It was not so much that they were determined to die at their posts, but that, once their lives had started in this way, they must take care that they did not die too soon. Risk their lives, yet somehow save them in the end for the inevitable toil. Here they were, two of them. Martha. Catherine looked at her. She was scanning the road for every dip there might be. She was speaking to the mare, persuasively urging her on now that they were past the rail tracks. The Hospital was on Third Street, just at the end of the block they were passing now. Catherine called at that moment: "Say, Martha, I reckon you'd better stop."

Martha turned round. She said: "Best to get on now, Catherine; we're right there."

There were two nurses standing outside on the portico and Martha called to them. She threw the reins over the mare's back and got down into the

road. She said: "Let's give you a hand down, Catherine; we'll have her there in no time now."

She lifted Nettie's head up and spoke to her. "Cheer up, Nettie, they're bringing a stretcher out."

The back of the cart was let down and Nettie was lifted out.

Catherine watched her being carried away.

Martha climbed back to her place in the buggy. She looked at Catherine and laughed. But she was looking harassed and worn with the strain of the long drive. Catherine asked her: "You didn't do the forty-seven miles, did you, Martha?"

Martha said: "Pretty near; we stopped for half hour at Wright's; lucky there was a moon. Gee, I don't know what we'd have done if there hadn't been."

Catherine said: "Come right home, Martha; Jim will get your breakfast; you must be just dying for a cup of tea."

Martha said: "I sure am. I reckon Nettie would have given something to have had a cup before she'd got to Hospital. My! that girl's got pluck. Well on fifty miles and a baby on the way."

Catherine said: "Why didn't her husband bring her in?"

Martha laughed at the idea.

"Armstrong: why, he's more careful over one of his mares than he is over Nettie. This is her third; she's had two miscarriages before—Armstrong's a

dirty beast." Then she said: "For Mercy's sake, I'd forgotten Nettie wanted Father Austin, and look, there he is. She was afraid of the baby dying before it got baptized."

Catherine said: "Is Nettie an R.C.?"

Martha said: "Yes, and Armstrong never lets her forget it."

She pulled up the mare. Father Austin stepped across the width of grass which bordered the side-walk.

Martha called to him: "Nettie Armstrong's just got to Hospital. I reckon she'll have her baby right away; we drove in last night—she had a real bad time."

He seemed to be taking in what was being said to him with a particularly quick sympathy.

He said: "Oh dear, that dreadful drive; bad enough when you're well; what would Nettie have done without you?"

He smiled at Catherine now. "I'm always trying to make a convert of Mrs Jackson, but she considers herself too good for us; I shall never catch up; well, I'll get along to Mrs Armstrong." Just as he was turning away from them he spoke to Catherine.

He said: "How's Arundale?"

Catherine said: "Fine."

He nodded: "Good."

Before he moved out of sight Catherine had turned her head and looked after him.

Later in the evening Catherine told Jim that she

was going along to the Hospital to inquire after Nettie Armstrong. Through the day she had thought and thought about Nettie. Once the ordeal was over, Martha had seemed to put Nettie right out of her mind. She had survived it and Nettie had survived it, and she laughed and talked as she drank her coffee as though the thing now was to get on with life. But Catherine still thought about Nettie. What could make up for all that she had suffered during that drive across the prairie? She thought of the two of them jolting along in the moonlight, the one of them guiding the mare along the roughened track, the other lying in the back of the cart catching her breath with pain. Catherine asked herself: "What's it for anyway?"

Poor Nettie. Catherine reckoned she'd enjoy the rest in the Hospital. She asked Jim: "I suppose you couldn't loan me a couple of dollars so's I could go around to the Rosary and get Nettie a few flowers."

Jim handed her five dollar notes. Somehow it lightened the burden of her thoughts to make up to Nettie for her night of pain. She went off hoping to get what she felt she would choose. Pink carnations. It did not take long to walk around to the Rosary, and after buying the flowers she wanted, she turned down Second Avenue.

Doc Wilson's auto was standing outside his bungalow. Catherine thought: "He'll soon be out and driving around." And then: "Oh say, aren't I just crazy to think of him at all?"

She asked at the Hospital whether she could see Nettie. She was told by all means she could. She exclaimed: "Why Gee, I thought she'd be all in."

The nurse laughed and led her through the corridor. Then she turned and said: "You are Mrs Jackson, arn't you?"

Catherine said: "No, my name's Patterson; I reckon Mrs Jackson will be along presently."

The nurse said: "Oh then, it's only Mrs Jackson can see her tonight."

Catherine said that was all right. She gave the nurse the flowers and sent Nettie her love. Anyway, Nettie would be pleased that Catherine had thought of her.

Along Second Avenue again. Doc Wilson's auto was still outside and he was just coming out to get into it. He waited on the side-walk till she came up and then said: "Hello, I'm just driving around your way." He opened the door of the auto.

She said: "I reckon I might as well walk."

"Come on," he said, "get right in; you're not looking any too good."

She said: "I've felt queer all day over Nettie Armstrong. They're the people who live on the ranch next the Jackson's. Martha Jackson drove her in last night; she had her baby a few minutes after they got her into the Hospital. Martha stopped outside our

place and I got into the cart so's as to hold Nettie's head to keep it from bumping. Gee, what do women stay in the West for anyway?"

He said: "Does that mean you think you will go back East?"

She shook her head.

"You don't want to go back East?"

"I reckon the West ain't so bad."

"What made you come West?"

"What made you?"

He smiled: "I thought maybe I'd like it."

She smiled back: "Some hopes."

He said: "Get into the auto."

Catherine said: "You remember that evening you called?"

He nodded. "Ah—ah."

"Jim was sure wild, believe me, till I told him I thought you were queer."

"I see. You're some little Solomon, aren't you? Get in anyway; we'll go round by Twelfth and I'll drop you at the corner."

He drove along slowly. They were both silent for a moment. Then Doc Wilson said: "You said Jim was wild because I called to see you at the café. I have a perfect right to call at the café, and Jim has no right whatsoever to be wild. In what way was he wild?"

"I kaint jest remember."

He said almost irritably: "For the land's sake don't say 'kaint.'"

"Why?"

"Arundale says it."

Catherine smiled and said: "I can't remember."

Doc Wilson said: "I think the way you have built up the business for Jim is great—you've been a wonder. Jim is more respected than I bet he's been in his life before, but you're both going to crash against a brick wall one day."

Catherine said: "How so? Say, you've gone right by Twelfth."

He said, driving on still slowly, "I know, I want to talk to you. Unless you'll come out later, will you?"

"You want to have a talk about Jim?"

She spoke as though for no other reason would she think of driving with him. He thought: "She's sure had a dose of men sometime."

She had lived under the same roof as Jim Arundale for a considerable time and showed no signs of falling in love with him. And in spite of the things a girl might hear of a man, if he had Arundale's looks and charm of manner it would not stop her from liking him over much. But Catherine was not in love with Jim. Otherwise when Wilson suggested they should discuss him she would have told him to mind his own business, or words to that effect.

She told him then that she would come out later and meet him there just where they were stopping.

Walking back she thought: "He's talking through his hat anyway. I suppose he thinks it's up to him to poke his nose in where he thinks there may be some sort of trouble coming. He gets an awful lot of chaps out of the mud. Him and Father Austin. Oh Gee, why can't all men be like the two of them or getting on that way. Fancy sitting beside a man in an auto for twenty miles and know if it was fifty he wouldn't start mauling you about. I reckon this kinder place wants a den of lions so the men would have some beasts to learn their ways from. Beasts are human anyway."

She thought of Martha's remark of the morning. "Armstrong's a dirty beast." She had not compared Armstrong to the beasts of the field nor even of the jungle. There were other beasts than they. The men of Elk's Head.

It was curious having to feel towards Jim a little surreptitious show of disloyalty through supper. She argued to herself that after all it had nothing to do with him. But he had shown the possibility of jealousy where Doc Wilson was concerned. Lately she had known that more and more was he conscious of her presence in the kitchen preparing the meals, upstairs tidying the bedrooms, sweeping them out. Sitting

opposite to him at meals. It was not that he looked at her more often, but that he saw her more completely. She had begun to think that after all the situation might be too big a one to handle. She was conscious of him only because of his consciousness of her. After she had locked her door at night she lay awake until he too crept up; for some reason he thought of her as being asleep and made as little stir as possible. He had said to her once or twice: "Did you hear me come up last night?"

And having heard him she would answer: "No, I reckon I'm just all in when I get to bed; I get to sleep right away."

So in creeping up every night he did not think of her as lying awake listening, but just being asleep.

It was easier on that account for him to pass her door without so much as a pause.

This ruse required no effort from her. She had not thought that other ruses might require further effort. In order to allay his jealousy she had played the humbug and told him something that should not have deceived a child. He had played the humbug equally in allowing himself to be deceived. Here she was now still discoursing on Nettie's ordeal of the morning. She wondered how much Nettie would have to pay for a private room at the Hospital. Martha said that Armstrong would not dare to have her put in the public ward because she—Martha—would never

let him forget it. And all the time she was talking she was conscious of Jim looking and looking at her so that at last she turned her head away from him and pretended to notice something in the road.

But it made no difference. She felt his eyes on her. A cart drove up outside and she knew it was the groceries being left. She got up and went to take them from the boy. She took them into the kitchen and placed them on the table. Jim had not stirred but she saw he was very slowly rolling a cigarette. When she went into the parlour she went over to him and said: "I reckon you ain't playing the game."

He said: "Ain't I?"

She said: "I shall have to quit if you don't."

He swung round in his chair. His eyes were shining and a little dilated as if he were frightened. He said hoarsely: "I'd go to Hell if you did."

She said: "There's no need, Jim; you've got spunk, you know you have. Come on, get a move on, don't sit there thinking. You go on out for a stroll somewhere." She fetched his stetson. "Get right along now; don't go thinking, for the love of Mick."

She could not describe to herself what it was she saw in his eyes as he looked at her. It was as well he moved out on to the veranda so that he did not hear her sob. It was a dry sob, more as though she had finished her crying instead of not having cried at all. And it stopped there. She stood for a moment

or two, listening to Jim walking away down the sidewalk.

As soon as he had gone Catherine thought: "Well now, that's a silly stunt; supposing if he sees us out in the auto."

The little scene took the glamour out of the prospect of the drive. Though perhaps she had not admitted up till then that it was to hold any glamour.

She would try to think that this was but a passing cloud. Perhaps Jim had had a tiring day. The weather was getting warm and it had been market-day. She cleared away the supper things and washed them up. The kitchen seemed empty without Jim there to help her. She had never noticed before that his going out had left an emptiness behind. She went up to her room to put on her things.

It was a relief to see Doc Wilson driving up the street just as she turned the corner. She got in beside him and he leaned across her and banged the door to. She said: "Could you drive along by the river track; I sent Jim off for a walk and he's gone along the other way."

"Let's see, we've come out to talk about Jim, haven't we?"

"Sure, that's all I've come for."

He reversed the auto and shot off down Twelfth Avenue. Once past the *dépôt* he turned in order to get on to the track which ran alongside the river.

He was looking ahead when Catherine presently glanced up at him. He had rather a small face, almost immature considering the strength that was in his nature, the power in his mind. Catherine began to wonder what it was that actually made a man. Made him into what he appeared to be to the woman who loved him. She found she was mentally reproving herself for thus keeping her eyes on him and said: "Geel! You're getting soft about him 'cause his coat fits." He did look well. She admitted it. But all the same she liked sitting beside Doc Wilson, looking up at his profile while he drove his auto looking straight ahead of him.

She realised that though they had come along the river track quite a way he was still keeping up the speed. Around them now there was the prairie stretching for miles, barren, bare and ugly. The river too, without a tree near by, not even a shrub. How it all invited a taunt, "make us beautiful if you will—have a try." Who could? Only in the winter when its hideousness was covered by the snow. She'd heard it was fierce in the winter, but the comfort was it did not last too long. Sometimes in October a blizzard might come and shatter all hopes of a tolerably warm Fall, but from February on one could watch West for the Chinook which would sweep all the whiteness away. At last he began to slow down. Not speaking until he had stopped the auto and pulled it round so that they were facing the river.

Then he took out his cigarette-case and opening it offered a cigarette to Catherine. She shook her head so he lit one for himself.

And after inhaling a time or two he said: "You know you are a most impossible person to talk to—you're not going to do a thing I ask you to."

Catherine cut in: "So I might have stayed at home and got on with the job."

He said quietly: "Does it seem that to you?"

"What?"

"Jim Arundale's tumble-down café—your home?"

She said: "I haven't any other."

"Supposing," he said, "if Jim breaks out again one day. He's bound to. Don't you realise that the more you build him up the more you'll drag away. You're building a house that he can never live in."

She said to him, and a little too intensely for it to please him: "Please let me be—please let me be."

Doc Wilson said: "Will you remember this, that if there is a hint of any trouble, I have a right to know. It was I who persuaded the town to allow Arundale to stay on; I'm responsible for him. What I want to point out to you is the fact of you being different to all the other women Jim has had to do with makes very little difference when you are in such close contact with him. You can catch measles off a beggar or a king. You have done a wonderful thing for Jim, but he must know that you can't go on living with him and you see if I speak to him——"

Catherine looked up at him and said: "No, I reckon that would jest about do for him; Jim's gotta temper all right. I guess we can go on for a bit as we are, anyway for a while."

Doc Wilson frowned. She went on: "I wish you reckoned I knew my job."

He said abruptly: "It isn't your job."

She said scoffingly: "You know everything."

"Yes?" And then pausing: "I don't know where you came from before you landed here in Elk's Head."

"Oh well," she responded, "maybe you'll know one day."

He said quietly: "Why not now?"

She shook her head.

"You don't trust me."

In answer she turned and looked into his eyes. He laid his hand quickly on hers. Only for a moment. When he removed it so that he might start the auto, she looked down at the hand he had touched and gently held it to her as though she were keeping something for ever within herself.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Jim made off up the street he had no idea in which direction he should go. Truth to tell, he was getting fed up with the advice of taking a stroll whenever Hell's own curse was upon him. However, now that he was out, the only thing was to stay out. What a joke if he swung off to the right here at the end of Forty-ninth Street and walked round until he had reached the Corona. The Corona. Gee! the easiest place to get drunk in. If only he'd stuck to the Corona for the joys of life—he laughed satirically.

He was walking with his head down, his eyes on the path, when he was suddenly conscious of someone saying, "Hullo." Good Lord! What on earth did Father Austin want to divert his thoughts like that for?

However, he said "hullo" back and then was conscious that he had stopped to say it. Father Austin immediately stepped off his veranda and asked Jim if he wouldn't come in and have a smoke with him. Jim felt relieved. He'd be saved then, after all, an interminable tramp across the prairie. He sat down in the chair Father Austin shoved towards him and pulled out his bag of Bull Durham. Father Austin spent a moment or two relighting his pipe. Jim looked

round him amusedly and said: "It sure looks funny to see a bookcase again."

Father Austin said: "I can't imagine why the average emigrant—after all we are all emigrants—should leave so much of himself and his country behind him. Now the Anglo-Indian who retires, invariably takes home with him a collection of Indian atrocities and proceeds to make himself at home, surrounded with things which one would imagine he would as soon forget. One supposes it is sentiment. But we come out to this country, which is in its way almost as foreign to us as any Asiatic Empire—unless one remains East or goes farther West—and we bring nothing of England with us."

Jim went over to the bookcase and examined the books. He said: "You can't say that of yourself. Not many yards from Main Street and it might be in the High."

Father Austin said: "How's that business of yours going?"

"Pretty good."

"Anyone could make a headway in Elk's Head if they chose to put their hand to the plough."

"It's pretty hard though, once you get stuck in the mud. Even if you get out of it, you never know when you may get stuck in it again."

Father Austin said: "Is that how you feel?"

Jim said: "Sure."

"Often?"

Jim nodded. "You bet. I don't know which is the greater Hell."

And then: "But of course you can't understand that."

Father Austin laughed. And then he said, as if still amused: "I am afraid that is not a very great compliment."

Jim asked: "How so?"

Father Austin leant towards him and said: "So you think I am rather a superfluity in Elk's Head as regards the Guide, Counsellor and Friend?"

"Good Lord, no, I didn't say that."

"And could I be any of those things unless I understood. Hold out your hands." Jim did so. Father Austin held out his as well. He said: "Much about the same. Four fingers and a thumb. I don't know that you're minus any of the limbs that I, too, possess. The same with everything, mind, body, and soul. My dear chap, we are all made alike. I have mentioned the soul last because it counts most. The star of the cast does not head the bill. For some reason more notice is taken of the name which is read last. It forces its importance on you, and so with the soul. It is extremely difficult to discover at what point the mind merges into the soul. It seems to me that each depends on the other and both on the driving force of the personality behind. Say you are driving a tandem: the horse in front leads, the second horse follows, and the driver can feel pretty sure of his paces

so long as he concentrates on the horse in front. But allow that one to swerve, shy, or bolt, or get out of hand, and both the steeds and the driver come to grief. The result is a big smash up. Our mind and soul is the tandem we have to drive through life, and we have to learn at an early age how to drive. Once having learnt the job, it seems as though it might be fairly easy, but the effort must never slacken."

Jim thought: "He's talking through his hat." But all the same he liked him. He had always thought it a bit queer that he had never resented an R.C. butting in on him as Father Austin had at the café. However much he was indebted to Doc Wilson he could never quite silence the suggestion that Doc Wilson held himself his moral superior.

Father Austin went on: "I must say there are few in this town who could have made such an effort as you have, Arundale, and won through. I should like to shake you by the hand, in spite of your thinking that I am not capable of understanding what that effort cost you. I doubt if I in your shoes could have been so successful. By saying that I assume that no one took particular pains ever to teach you how to drive your tandem. The Victorian mother was no sports-woman, the Victorian father unsporting. I don't think that in the future unsuccessful sons will be sent out to Canada——"

Jim laughed: "To sink or swim."

Father Austin said: "They only said that as a sort

of metaphor. Before making such a suggestion they should have found out whether there was a possibility of doing either."

He looked at his watch and told Jim he had a visit to pay before turning in for the night. He said he hoped that Jim would look him up again. He said it as though he principally had profited by the companionship of the last hour.

When Jim arrived back at the café Catherine had gone to bed. He took his shoes off in the parlour and crept quietly up the stairs. His own door was open, so he went through into the room and placed his shoes down at the end of the bed. Then he returned to the door in order to close it. He looked across at Catherine's door. He heard the clock ticking down in the parlour, for it had a noisy tick, and everywhere it was very silent. He had found relief. From where he could not say. Had he tramped across the prairie stubble he would have returned, he knew, in not such a very different frame of mind from that in which he set out. To watch the river swirling down to the East, bordered by the cut-banks, colder and uglier than the cliffs of Dover, only increased the irritation of his soul. His soul! He really had not thought that his soul was actually dependent on his power of thought. Though, perhaps, where he was concerned, it was not so much power as powerlessness. He kissed his hand in the direction of Catherine's room and closed his

door very quietly. He lay down on his bed in his clothes intending not to sleep but to think.

He came to the conclusion that each individual thought of himself far too much as an individual. Father Austin who had appeared to be, more than anyone else, the individual of Elk's Head seemed to look on himself as one of a very common herd. The same as everyone else. But it was nonsense to think this. It struck him as queer that the man who was cleanest in the town and the man who at one time had been the grimmest should have met that evening and smoked together as though they were one of a kind. Was it that which had brought this content? But after all content was a mediocre thing. The life he had lived had held such excitement, though he had to admit that it brought along with it a discontent from which at the time he could find no relief. What was the use of living anyway? The café? At times he was hopelessly bored with the routine of making lemon squashes and boiling the water for the coffee, even though he was making quite a good turn-over. He laughed. The café was certainly not an incentive to live, though it had proved a pleasant diversion.

What was there, then, to live for? He knew. Oh, Hell! He rolled over on the bed and buried his face in the pillow, as if in the endeavour to stifle the knowledge.

CHAPTER IX

DURING the following week Catherine felt that Jim's mood of restlessness had passed off and left him unusually sanguine. He helped religiously with the labours of the café. They found that, when the sun blazed all the afternoon, the folk did not frequent the café until later in the evening, so that from lunch-time on they each had time for a tolerable siesta. The heat had tried Catherine and, but for leaving Jim, she would have begged a week off, so that she could stay with Martha on the ranch. She wondered whether Doc Wilson and Father Austin would keep an eye on Jim if she did go away. Maybe, if she could get a week's refreshment on the prairie, Jim could go later and get some riding on the ranch.

This idea brought a certain amount of relief to her mind, for, much as the heat and the work tried her, in addition there was the perpetual watch on Jim. Then for how long could she keep the thought of Wilson out of her mind? Not for long. Sometimes, maybe, when business was at its height and she would be called hither and thither, boiling up the milk or washing up the cups. Then in the lull his profile again. She saw him whichever way she looked. The cut of his coat, which she scoffed at herself for remembering;

his hands upon the steering-wheel of the auto; the way he sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded on his knee. After all she had seen him a good many times, and she believed that if it were double as many she would remember each time and see him here, there and everywhere, whichever way she looked. Still, the days went by, she counted them.

So many since she had seen him last. Only for a fleeting moment, just as his auto had gone around the corner of Forty-ninth Street, and he had not seen her. But wasn't that as well, for the few times he had seen her he had pulled his auto up and offered her a lift? And she had not accepted; she had told him she was going right home. And he quite saw that, though she was perfectly free to do as she pleased, she was keeping faith with a queer little idiosyncrasy of her own. She knew that once Jim's jealousy was aroused his vices would run riot. She did not know that Doc Wilson was possessed of admirable patience and that, whenever he saw her retreating from him down the street, after her refusal to get into the auto, he thought: "What a smash up one day."

Perhaps she never saw into the future, and that was why, for the time being, she was content that Jim's moodiness had been shed away, so that the atmosphere was pleasant and comfortable once again.

She was glad when one day he noticed her lagging a bit over the work, for she then broached the subject of a holiday. Couldn't she go first—a week or ten

days out with Martha, maybe a day or two with Nettie Armstrong? And, when she came back, he could go and get some shooting in the Montanas, it would do him a world of good.

She said: "You've never reckoned to take up ranching?"

Jim said: "That's a game that needs capital and a man can't stand living like that alone without coming in and busting all the money he's made in twenty-four hours. And the kind of women who stick that sort of life would just about bore me."

Catherine broke out impatiently: "The kind of woman that sticks that sort of life is too good, I reckon, for any man on this earth. Gee! You make me sick—you men. You're all rotten, and you talk of being bored with women fit for Heaven. Bored! I reckon the women are bored all right, but they stick it out."

"Sure," agreed Jim, "you're right every time."

Her tirade had caught his attention. He looked at her and noticed her obvious fatigue. He said: "I reckon you'd better get away with Martha next time she's in."

She looked at him hopefully.

"You'd manage?"

"Sure."

And then: "I reckon you're wondering if it's safe to leave me."

She did not answer.

"Maybe," he said, "you'll ask Doc Wilson to keep an eye on me."

She brought her wisdom into play at once. She said: "No, Jim, I reckon I'd trust you."

He was not sure. And yet he felt that he could believe every word she spoke.

She said: "Anyway, a week soon goes by—it's no time really."

"No," he said, "it's no time." Though if he passed his own opinion on the length of time, it would seem too long to comprehend.

"Maybe," he said, "you'd stay longer than a week."

She shook her head. "No, Jim, a week's all I could stand of the prairie. I shan't fall in love with any cattle rancher, no Sirree."

She had meant to sound jocular, but her laugh conveyed to Jim the idea that she was saying: "This is where I want to be, if you want to know the truth, right here, not in the café but just in Elk's Head, anywhere—anywhere, s'long as it's not too far from him." Her flippancy had savoured of the woman's who is very much in love. She had laughed as though nothing in this world counted but one thing, and that one thing she held very near to her heart. It was not for Jim to know. She was serving him and for good wages. They lived as friends and near together. But as far as he was concerned he might not have been there at all.

And he knew it.

There were so many things she wished to buy to take with her that she thought: "I am bound to see him before I go."

She wanted to take something out for Nettie's baby and a thing or two for Martha in return for her hospitality. After all it was quite a little excitement buying the things and spreading them out for Jim to see. He entered into her enthusiasm and showed no sign whatever of fear or dolefulness at the thought of her departure. Subconsciously he knew he was thinking far ahead, or it seemed far ahead. He was focusing his mind on the moment for her return. He carried her grip down the stairs and placed it in the back of the buggy. Then he returned and, finding she had not yet come down from her room, he went up and stood on the landing just outside her door. He said: "Martha's just about fixed up."

Catherine said: "I'm right here."

She came through the doorway with her hat pulled down over her eyes and tilting her head up so as to speak to him.

He said abruptly: "Take your hat off."

She took it off.

He said: "May I kiss you?"

She said, and as though to refuse or consent was not her own responsibility, "Sure."

He kissed her on the forehead once and very softly.

CHAPTER X

THERE was still a chance of seeing him, for after all there was Main Street to drive down and the street which ran alongside the railway track for a little way before they drove through the cutting which took them on to the prairie. But she thought: "Maybe I'd feel disinclined to go, if I did see him." And then thought: "Oh Shucks, what's the use."

She liked being there beside Martha. Old man Jackson had stayed behind for a night and intended coming out the following day with Ted Armstrong, who had come in to see about selling some cattle.

As they drove along Catherine asked: "Do you ever reckon you'll sell out and come and live in the Head?"

Martha said: "Maybe. George has been trying to get in, the last two winters. Old Willoughby's promised to try and get him a Government job. I think it's pretty certain, only a bit too good to be true." She laughed. "The prairie'd have been all right if we all had old Willoughby's luck." She laughed still more.

Catherine asked: "Did he have much capital?"

Martha chuckled: "Sure, he had capital. He had the slickiest way of thieving and branding cattle. He

made off once over the border, but after a bit he came back and stood drinks all round to the men he'd got away from. He says there's no fun like getting away from the law, so you can laugh at it at a distance."

Catherine said: "I guess there's some don't think it as funny as all that."

Martha said: "I reckon the law's the funniest thing out in this country. You've got to be a Mr Foxy, that's a cinch, to get on with it."

Catherine thought: 'Perhaps after all the prairie isn't so bad. It's open and free and wind-swept.'

Nothing but space around—the ground undulating like great smooth waves covered with yellow tufts of grass. Burnt up—barren—bare. No sounds but the coyotes at night, nothing to see but an occasional prairie fire rushing along the horizon like an express train in flames. Mile after mile, the ruts deep along the track. The gophers scooting into their holes as they drove along. Yet women lived here. Any number of women. They laughed like Martha, and grew lined and weather-beaten, but were invincible, excepting those who could not survive and went under. They stood together like a band of heroines, not counted as such because of their actual insignificance. Their insignificance to the men who might weigh their sacrifice with a couple of drinks.

They were to stop at the Wrights' farm for a meal and exchange the horse Martha was driving for their own. After that they would continue their journey

and expect to get home somewhere about ten or twelve o'clock.

It was eerie. The last few miles driven in silence, the moon high in the sky and the distant barking of coyotes. Here and there were little groups of stunted trees. And near the groups perhaps one or two would stand away from the rest. They looked uncannily like people crouching in the dark. Martha occasionally laid the whip across the back of the mare and said encouragingly: "Step out, Floss—we're just home."

Home! Catherine thought: "Gee, I reckon if I lived here all my life I couldn't call it home."

Yet if not home, what then?

Now here they were, and after all it was pleasant to see the ranch as it appeared down there in the dip, sheltered and peaceful. And even at this hour there was a welcome for them, for the lad who worked on the ranch had prepared a meal, and the gleam of the lamp was indeed a cheerful sight for those who might otherwise have found abuse for the desolation around.

The dogs came barking around them as they drew up a few yards from the door. Martha called Bandy and told him to take Catherine's grip out of the buggy and the other things they had brought out with them. When she got out of the buggy the dogs jumped up at her welcoming her. Bandy went round to the mare's head and stroked her neck in token that this vigil he had kept was now over. The mare nosed him, sensing

the welcome. And all the moonlight. This meeting—this return of wanderers from afar, so glad, so thankful to be back. Yes, Catherine thought, after all, it was home. It was altogether in a frame—the moon, the log shack, the starlit sky, Bandy welcoming the mare, and Martha the dogs.

And far away to the south the Montana Mountains ranged like a black uneven edge against the sky.

CHAPTER XI

CATHERINE was impatient to take over as soon as possible the things she had bought for Nettie's baby. Martha asked her if she could manage the three-mile walk there and back, as she reckoned she could not spare Bandy to drive her over, and she herself had far too much to do. Catherine said: "I reckon I could walk, but couldn't I have one of the horses?"

Martha said: "Sure, you can have Daisy. How was I to know you'd get on a Gee's back? I didn't know Toronto girls rode."

As much as to say: "Now's your chance—I reckon you've no need to bury your past."

Catherine said: "You just watch me." In a moment she said: "Why, it would do Jim a world of good to come out here. Did he say he'd come out after I went back?"

"Oh, I reckon he'll come out, but he won't stay long."

After a moment. "He's tied up in a knot, Jim is, and I wouldn't like to be the one to untie him. For the love of Mick, Catherine, what's that boy going to do?"

Catherine said: "If I quit right now, I reckon I'd feel queer all my life. I ain't going to quit."

Martha said: "Oh well, we might as well believe in miracles after one's happened. Let 'em all come, say I."

"If Jim makes enough this winter he could sell out and clear off home to the old country; I reckon it's different over there."

"Maybe——" And then as though she had been ruminating over Jim's past: "Seems a kinder pity you weren't his mother, only a mother could do what you've done for Jim, only it's a bit late. Oh Gee, winter before last, there wasn't much to choose between Jim and the devil."

Catherine said: "You reckon it's been worth while—my helping him around and keeping him off the drink?"

Martha said: "Sure, only where do you come in, that's what I want to know?"

Catherine laughed: "Oh I come in all right, don't you worry."

The things for Nettie's baby were put into a satchel which Martha strapped round Catherine so that she would have both hands free for the reins. Martha looking at Catherine could not think of her as a prairie rider. And yet any doubts were dispelled when Bandy brought Daisy up from the corral. Catherine laughed: "So you've decked her up in a saddle, eh?"

Martha directed her as to which way she should go. She said: "Don't you go attempting the Cut now,

you go right around over the hill and then down alongside. If you keep along there," she pointed in the direction of the Montanas, "you'll see Allen's old shack; it's all fallen in; you can't go by without seeing it."

Catherine urged Daisy forward and at the same time seemed to arrive in the saddle with an easier leap than Martha had ever seen anyone give.

The prairie had lost its eeriness by now. If it was a prison, as it had seemed to be the evening before when they had driven in from the town, it was a prison which had a certain freedom to impart. The sun scorched but the wind cooled. It was blowing strongly all the time. Catherine had borrowed a wide stetson from Martha; it was a little too big and sank low on her forehead.

She turned the brim up in front and the wind kept it so as she cantered along, her feet hanging out of the stirrups.

She had reached the top of the hill which sloped gradually up from the back of the Jackson's ranch. To the left there were a few acres of trees, hardly a wood, more a collection of tallish shrubs, affording no shade but merely a landmark.

Catherine pulled at the reins. It was fine up here. She twisted herself round in the saddle and looked towards Montana. Down below, the valley stretched for miles and miles and miles. She could see here a ranch looking like a child's model, and there a farm-

stead belonging to some emigrant Dago. Every inch resembled every mile until it was bordered by the horizon or the mountains. Far in the distance was Elk's Head. Elk's Head. She began to imagine it. And imagine things that related to it.

How fatal after all to sit there on Daisy's back, holding the reins loosely as though there were no purpose in her ride. What else could one expect but that her thoughts would return, though she herself was there fifty miles from habitation and the human world? But after all was he there or here beside her? She felt she wanted to laugh at the distance which for a moment had induced her to think that she and he were all that way apart. She loved alone: she was positive of that, but laughed again to think that there could be anything in the state of singleness which could be deplored. It would give her strength to achieve the purpose she had at heart and which he took to be merely a ridiculous pretension. They thought she was young. She was as old as the space around her. She knew more than all of them put together. She could stand firm where they might reel. She could endure; she would not faint by the wayside. Her lagging of the previous week had been but a physical weakness, caused by the heat. She could account for it now that she was out here in the open. It had not for a moment been that she was wavering in her purpose. And she had felt the evening before, as they had driven along the interminable track, that she wished

she had stayed behind. She thought: "If I had the chance of being right now in Main Street or Second Avenue likely to meet him at any moment, I would say, 'No Sirree, let me be here.' This is where I'm most likely to meet him and no one around to know."

She moved on, taking Daisy against Martha's advice down the Cut, so that she was leaning back, her head almost touching Daisy's flanks and able to look up at the sky. Down again on level ground and the Armstrong's ranch in view. It was astounding how a column of smoke could proclaim itself so certainly the sign of life. Life. That meant that in all the miles around there was Nettie and the baby. And the coyotes at night. One did not forget them or indeed the cattle. As she got nearer she hallooed so that Nettie might know of her coming. There she was with the baby in her arms. How grateful she must feel that the baby had survived the ordeal of that dreadful drive. So much fear of the prairie could be dispelled by the holding of a baby in one's arms. Otherwise Nettie would have nothing but the cattle and Armstrong himself. She laughed. That was right to put the cattle before Armstrong; he deserved it, if he was what Martha had called him.

Nettie came forward to greet Catherine. They had only met three or four times, but here they were greeting each other as though there was something firmer than

friendship between them. It was something indescribable which linked the women of the prairie together with the women of the town. Their lives were an alternation of sacrifice and servitude. Perhaps they would have felt guilty if they had been tempted to omit either from their daily existence. But who could guess now that the ranch was not Nettie's Nirvana? She was animated with a sparkle and a ready cheerfulness and proudly showing the baby off to Catherine, or so Catherine pretended, for she felt at once that she must hold it.

Nettie said: "Next girl I have, I'll call it Catherine for sure."

Catherine exclaimed: "For the land's sake, Nettie, don't say you'll have another."

Nettie laughed: "Here, you take her and I'll put Daisy in the corral."

It was pleasant to be here with Nettie, sitting in the rocker with the baby in her lap. The baby lay on its back looking up at her with eyes full of content and inquiry. The clothes Catherine had brought out were tried on and taken off, folded up and put away for the winter months. It stole a little of the tolerance of fate from Catherine, sitting there rocking backwards and forwards. Turning the baby over on its front when it hiccoughed, so that it lay there staring at the floor. Nettie thought: "Now how on earth did she know the baby had wind?" She looked at Catherine

and said: "I reckon you ought to have a baby of your own."

Catherine said: "Playing with them's different to starting one on your own."

Then Nettie asked: "Do you reckon all they say about Jim Arundale's true?"

Catherine said: "I reckon so—anyway he's making good now."

She knew what Nettie was wondering, whether she would one day marry Jim.

She said: "I'm reckoning to make enough to get him back to the old country."

Nettie said: "I reckon he ought to be all over you, seeing what you've done for him."

"Thanks," said Catherine, "I'd rather he wasn't."

Nettie talked of the Hospital, and Catherine thought: "Now if she gets started on him, I'm making straight for the ranch."

But when Nettie began to talk of all the things she'd heard in Hospital about Doc Wilson, Catherine sat there and listened.

Nettie's voice unfolded to her scene after scene. Catherine closed her eyes and thought: "Oh Gee, why can't Nettie stop?"

Nettie suggested Catherine spending a night or two with her before she returned to Elk's Head. Catherine said: "I reckon I could; maybe I could do a bit of mending for you or do some sewing; you seem to be on the go just all the time."

Nettie said: "Sure, the boys come around here an awful lot, and Gee, they eat the food up something fierce. I keep baking bread. They're a crazy bunch around here. They used to go around to Garland's place, but now poor Minty's the way she is they keep clear. Though Les keeps hanging around her still. He sticks her on a mare sometimes and takes her all over the place with him, and that's something that Garland won't do. I reckon they look fine together, Les and Minty. He was in a swell regiment in the old country. He got the Victoria Cross when he was a young fellow way off in South Africa. Gee, ain't his eyes blue though he's always soaked. If he'd been the one to marry Minty I reckon he'd have pulled up straight and done her proud. They came over the other morning and he lifted her down from the mare jest as though she were his own. And he's mighty proud of her. He's always the one that goes and hunts around when she makes off all alone, and even if he's soaked to the wide, he's always able to find her. She looks dandy even in that old stetson of Garland's she wears with her yellow curls jest showing. They sure look fine together, but Gee, when you think of it, Les all soaked through with the liquor and Minty batty the way she is, I reckon it makes you feel queer seeing the two of them around together."

Catherine said: "Don't they reckon she'll ever get right again."

Nettie said: "Maybe—they said if she had another

child that might bring her sense back, but the woman that chores there says Garland never touches her: says he ain't going to have any more kids around giving worry, no Sirree."

The sun was setting when Catherine rode back. She urged Daisy into a gallop as soon as she parted with Nettie. She wanted to get on to the summit which overlooked the mountains beyond. There she reined Daisy in and gazed once more in the direction of Elk's Head.

The stories she heard all around of the brutishness of mankind! Men. Were they all like that? Seemed like it anyway. But, oh surely, *he* was different to all these others. And he approved of her. Was solicitous as to her well-being: even worried over her. Was it all a pretence to think that alone there she was not alone? Was it supposition that brought the solace of singleness? Could it all be swept away by the thought that if a cloak was shed he would be found to be like the rest?

The sun setting, dipping beyond the river far away, reassured her. There was splendour in life as well as in the sky. Wonder enough to make your heart stand still.

She was sure of it.

CHAPTER XII

MARTHA said that before Nettie went back they must have a bit of a party. She said: "Minty loves a party: we'll ask her and Les to come up. And I'll get Bandy to go over and get young Richards; he's over at the Camerons. He's gotta banjo and a gramophone. He's keen on ranching; seems as how he'll do fine too, one of these days. It was good he struck the Camerons, 'cause they're decent folk to be with. They've got three kids there. They reckon to send them all in to the Connaught school one of these days. Those people have got guts if you like. They came out to the Head without a dime in their pockets. She gotta job as chamber-maid at the Corona and he got work at one of the stores. By the time the first baby came she'd put by enough to quit working, leastways at the Corona: and she bought a sewing-machine on the hire purchase and made everything you can imagine. She turned out shirts—she made some dandy ones for George—and shirt-waists, Gee, you couldn't tell them from Eaton's. Then this place was going cheap—there were a heap of people after it, but do you think Cameron let it slip through his fingers? No, Sirree. He was right on the spot with the dollars and walked away with it as easy as anything. They had a cruel time

the first two winters they were out here. But Mrs Cameron seems to have a way of rearing chickens; I don't know how she does it; seems as though nothing goes wrong. So after the drought and there was no crops to speak of, she pretty well just kept them going with the birds, taking them into the Head and selling them. Though I don't mind betting none of them were full to the brim that winter. Once something went wrong with the gee, and old Will Wright had gone into town before she drove along, and will you believe me, Mrs Cameron walked the ten miles into the Head so's she could sell her little lot. And what's more, she walked the ten miles back again 'cause she missed old Pa Wright in the town. You couldn't down the Camerons if you tried ever so hard. This young Richards that's there now learns the little boy his lessons in between whiles for his board and keep. He's a nice fellow, young Richards is."

Catherine thought: "I reckon it's funny to be the one around and no one knowing anything about me. Seems as though they don't know anything else but what they're all doing from one year's end to another. They can't talk of anything else."

Martha said: "If Nettie had a mind to come for the evening, do you think the two of you could sleep in that room together? I've gotta basket that would do for the baby."

Catherine said: "Sure, I reckon it's a treat for Nettie

to have a night out. Armstrong isn't a Variety entertainer."

"I believe Garland's gone into town; so much the better. Les will bring Minty up; I'll get Bandy to go and give them a call some time later on."

"Maybe it would be just as well to ask them for tomorrow evening, before Garland gets back. We don't want him around here glaring at us with those black eyes of his. Once he starts jawing you feel you want to bury him under the Crag."

Martha began the preparations. Somehow they did not seem like preparations, but merely a foretaste of the feast. And the foretaste seemed, in turn, to provide an opportunity for the using up of this and that supply as though the whole adventure was one long string of happy ideas. The last jar of mince-meat—that would do fine. Bandy could spend the morning in killing the cockerels.

Catherine rode over to Nettie and came back with the news that she'd just love to come, but she hoped the baby wouldn't worry any; it was teething and cried something fierce at night. And it was all right about Minty coming: Garland wouldn't be back for two or three days. She wanted to come over quite early in the afternoon and help Martha with anything there was to be done. She would bring her work. Les was riding over to the post-box to see if the mail had been dropped in, and he'd leave her at Martha's on his way in case she might have a letter to mail.

Catherine stood on the doorstep the following day and watched the two of them as they climbed the hill.

Les had sat Minty on his mare and was walking beside her. Nettie was right. They looked fine together. Catherine thought: "Why, they sure look as though they'd come straight out of the Movies."

And Minty waved to Catherine as they came near just as though she knew her quite well and it was no surprise to see her there. She called out: "Now I'm not a bit too early, because I'm going to make myself very useful."

Les lifted her down from the mare and she stood smiling at Catherine. Her mouth was rather wide and her lips thin; she had a short upper lip, so that when she smiled she showed her small but very even teeth. It was her seeming wealth of happiness that was her charm. It was as though the world in which she lived was so, so good. And she could and would make you believe it.

"Now dear," she said to Les, "you'd better get on; we shall expect you when we see you." She laughed gaily at Catherine. "He is going to fetch the letters; he'll have time, won't he?"

Catherine was looking at Les now. He was much older than Minty; might be twenty years. He had very deep lines each side of his mouth and his forehead, too, was deeply lined. At times he would pucker his

brow, which gave him a look of indescribable unhappiness. Whenever he turned his attention to anyone his manner showed intense interest and kindness towards them.

He began to fumble in his pockets. Then handed over to Minty a thimble, needle-case, and a minute box. He said: "But I might as well come in. Martha may have a letter she wants posted."

"It's beautiful up here," said Minty. "Don't you think it's beautiful?" She turned to Catherine.

Catherine said: "I reckon it's fine; it's some treat, believe me, when you've been in town for quite a while."

"Have you been here long?"

"All butta week."

"Isn't Mrs Jackson a dear?"

She smiled again, first at Catherine, and then she turned her eyes on Les. "We love her, don't we, Leslie?"

Les said, laughing: "Of course, Mrs Jackson is the only woman I've ever loved."

"Now, Leslie, don't be so shameless. And besides, you know it's not true." She turned to Catherine. "It isn't true—he loves me, don't you, dear?"

Les began to urge her towards the shack. He had hold of her arm. She dropped the thimble. It lay hidden in the grass so that he had to search for it. When he had retrieved it he stuck it on her finger and said indulgently: "Butter fingers."

His face was red: whether with the exertion of stooping for the thimble or with Minty announcing so blatantly that he loved her, Catherine did not know.

They were happy the three of them together, laughing and talking to each other. Martha might tell a vulgar tale or of something abhorrent so plainly that Minty might go up to her and put her slender hand against Martha's mouth. And turn playfully to Catherine and say: "Mrs Jackson is a dreadful woman, a really, really dreadful woman."

And then Minty told them that John had promised to bring some material back with him for her to make a winter dress with. She said to Catherine: "I love sewing, don't you?"

It was now and again when perhaps Martha and Catherine spoke of something which excluded Minty from the conversation, that Catherine noticed how dreamy Minty's eyes became, and as though from being bright and cheerful she became lost in thought.

As if she were allowed to stay like that dreaming—wondering, she might begin to float away on her dream, and vanish across the mountains. She took out the sewing she had brought, a camisole she was making for herself. She was whipping on the finest of lace. She held the length of it out to Catherine. She said: "Isn't

it lovely lace? I bought it at Harrod's." She spoke as though she had been out shopping that very morning.

It struck Catherine that when she drew your attention to anything at all, it was always to something beautiful, or at least the thing that was farthest away from the ugliness which surrounded her life. Perhaps after all her life was a merciful delusion. She was so terribly misplaced. Catherine as a city girl knew that. She'd seen dandy women like Minty sitting in their autos in Toronto outside the big stores, wrapped in furs and clothes to make your mouth water.

Minty had no business sitting there in Martha's old rocker dressed in that plain kinder cotton frock.

If she was acting for the Movies it wouldn't be so bad. And later on in life maybe she'd get stuck in that place where they sent all the women who went crazy on the prairie. Catherine shivered. At that moment Martha called from the kitchen: "These mince-pies are about all right."

Minty laid her sewing down and went in to Martha. She stood in the doorway before she went right out, and smiled at Catherine.

She said: "I don't know your name."

"Catherine."

Minty said: "What a nice name, may I call you Catherine?"

"Sure."

Les arrived back with the mail. He handed Minty a roll of illustrated papers. She held out her hand eagerly. She exclaimed: "Oh, Leslie, how delightful; please undo them for me." She handed them back to him.

He took out his knife and severed the string.

Looking up, he happened to catch Catherine's eye.

He laughed: "Now she won't speak to us for a week, will you, old lady?"

Minty said: "Not for two, Leslie." And handed a *Tatler* to Catherine. "I love them, don't you?"

Catherine said: "I reckon the *Saturday Evening Post* is hard to beat."

Les said: "Hear, hear, I think so too."

Minty said: "Well, anyway, Mr Jackson doesn't think so, do you, Mr Jackson?"

Somehow, with them all there, Catherine saw how the loneliness of the prairie became for the time being something mythical and really not in existence. For each one of them was at the beck and call of the other, and they knew it. After all, one might live in a city and never have a neighbour. Here you were sure of it. If you'd asked any of them to jump over the moon for the other, Catherine reckoned they'd do it, or anyway have a good try.

Here was Nettie with the baby and all pairs of hands ready to relieve her of her burden. But she wouldn't be relieved. No Sirree, the baby was as cross as two sticks with teething, and she wasn't going to have it

all fussed up just as she'd got it quietened down. She left them all and went into Martha's room. Catherine looked up and saw that Minty was dreaming again. It was as though every now and again she administered to herself some narcotic, which lulled her and at the same time deprived her of her smiling charm. She was far away from them all. She did not matter to them, and certainly they did not matter to her. For all she cared they might leave her to dream there for as long as they pleased.

It seemed as though one could not go anywhere without having a spot of trouble to keep your eye on all the time. When she was at the café there was Jim for her to watch and, as it were, keep within earshot for fear he might call out for help. It might not be his voice she would listen for, but she knew instinctively the times when he wanted tiding over a difficult day. And you couldn't help seeing Jim without something choking you up somewhere.

And so with Minty. She might laugh and appear to be the happiest out there in that empty, barren world, but you knew underneath, her heart was all twisted up so's somehow it didn't beat as the ordinary woman's should.

It was quite a treat to sit around a big table with a lotta kindly folk like these.

Martha was bursting with good spirits, and she and Nettie were laughing as though, for them, there had

never been a care in the world. And Les was looking after Minty as though there could never be, as long as he lived, another woman in the world for him. Old Jackson was in good form and made a lewd remark about the cockerel he was carving. So that Martha cried out: "Now then, George, remember you're in polite society."

Les, catching Martha's eye, quietly sniggered.

Young Richards, whom Martha had praised, was a cute youngster, and he had brought his banjo along with him and was only too ready to play it.

Nettie had quite a swell jumper on and looked very different to the little thing who had moaned and groaned lying in the back of the Jackson's cart a few months before. She had titivated in Catherine's room: had powdered her face and used Catherine's lipstick.

She had said: "Armstrong wouldn't be half mad if he saw me using this."

And when she appeared in the sitting-room, old Jackson rolled up the paper he had been reading and looked at her through it as though he were looking through a telescope.

He was a silly old thing at the best of times, and his jokes were of the poorest; but now his action made them all laugh because of the estimable *bonhomie* which existed between the whole lot of them.

One could imagine how, in the days of the Revolution, those who were destined to be guillotined the following day could dance and play with each other with the

gayest and friendliest of spirit, because a seeming adversity bound them together. Or perhaps it was that from making the best of each other they grew to imagine they were necessary to each other. As indeed they were.

Old George said: "Come on, Nettie, give us a high kick."

But Nettie sat down in a chair. She said: "I reckon I could kick all right if I had a mind to."

Young Richards said: "Now you're tantalising us, Mrs Armstrong."

He took up his banjo and began to play. He had an easy soft baritone and sang and played with the assurance of a professional.

He went through the favourites. They all joined in the choruses. The noise woke Nettie's baby up and it began to cry. Young Richards softened his playing so that it was reduced to just a soft hum. They all stopped singing and seemed to sit there quietly, their eyes lowered to the floor, as though by now they were all a bit tired.

Catherine eyed first one, then another. Only Minty held her head up. And she had begun to dream. The door was open, and through it Catherine could see the darkness of the prairie—the starlit sky. It was vast, even just seeing that little space out through the door. And it was calling to Minty.

Catherine felt that. The baby was just whimpering now as though soothed by young Richards' playing.

The others were still pensively looking down on the floor. But Catherine kept her eyes on Minty. She sat there as though she were in a trance. Till presently she got up very, very quietly from her chair and went out through the door into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII

So the summer was over and September came, which led them into the Fall. They had both been away.

Catherine was ten dollars up, the week she had run the café alone. Jim teased her: "I guess you did someone out of their change all right."

"No such thing," said Catherine. "You do what I say, and you'll be getting folk's change without asking for it."

For Catherine had come back from the ranch with the determination to enlarge the premises and so manage to double the turnover, if possible, through the winter months. She would force the interest of the café into her very being, so that she would have little time to think of ought else: anyway through the day. And if, once the toil of the day was over, she went up to her room, why yield to the temptation of sitting still on the edge of her bed, her hands lying in her lap, her mind a blank save for the thought of one alone? Jim had somehow stridden forward in his outlook on life. He admitted his visits to Father Austin had built him up. But even so there were times when he showed a restlessness that was unmistakable and a sullenness that only Catherine could persuade away. Perhaps he was now so accustomed to her presence that, when his temper

was hot, he would abuse her. It was once when her own nerves were too much on edge to make a reply, that he returned after a moment or two and, taking up her hand, kissed it and said: "Only God knows why he made me a beast instead of a man."

But, after all, these times were few in number in comparison with the ones when they sat amicably over their meals and found a genuine pleasure in each other's companionship.

Sometimes she wondered whether it wouldn't be better to disregard Doc Wilson's counsel and marry Jim. But this contemplation remained but a moment in her mind. It was dispelled solely by the memory of nursing Nettie's baby. Through September she very seldom left the café, spending her spare time in her room, renovating her clothes or darning Jim's socks.

She had shed, without meaning to, a lot of the impertinence which had been her armour against all invasion.

She did not feel inclined to banter audaciously the men she served in the parlour. She did not shut Jim up as hastily as of yore: she was not as brusque with the men from the stores. The man from Montana commented on it. It had galled him for a long time that Catherine paid no attention to his advances. His opinion had been that by constant nagging she would sooner or later loosen out. What was her game anyway?

He had just approached her and received the usual

rebuff. The rebuff had been overheard by the other men who were sitting at the same table as himself.

They laughed. They were all sure for Catherine.

So, not to be outdone, the Montana man excelled himself in passing a most obnoxious remark about Catherine across the table. He had not reckoned that his voice would carry through into the parlour where Jim happened to be smoking. Jim had not been certain at first whether he had heard rightly or not. So he came and stood in the verandah and, looking at the Montana fellow, he said: "I reckon you can just stand up and tell these others that you're drunk and, when you're drunk, you're like as not to make powerful mistakes."

The Montana man replied: "Next time you get your hair clipped I reckon it wouldn't harm any to get your ears clipped as well."

Jim turned to the others. He asked: "Did this—— say something that deserves my fist?"

One of them said: "Sure."

And then to the aggressor: "You sure asked for it; you'd have got it from one of us anyway."

Jim's arm flew out. The fellow from Montana went down like a ninepin.

CHAPTER XIV

THEY stood around looking down at him. The blood poured from his face. One of the older men knelt down, more with the impulse that something ought to be done, though he was not certain what. That hit of Jim's was a clean one, sure, and deserved, but all the same it would be as well to ascertain quite how far he had been knocked out. Jim was thoroughly unconcerned. Everyone else got up from their chairs and crowded round. Jim edged away from them and went into the kitchen. He held his knuckles under the tap.

Catherine was standing by the gas stove. She moved a few steps towards him. The silence in the parlour attracted her attention, and looking through the doorway she saw everyone standing in a group just by the veranda. She looked at Jim and had now moved sufficiently near him to see the blood trickling from his knuckles. She said: "For the land's sake, what's the matter now?"

Jim did not answer. So she went outside and asked sharply of the others: "What's the matter, boys?"

One said: "You get right away from here, Catherine; you've no call to come around here." He tried to turn her around and persuade her back into the parlour.

But she twisted herself out of his grasp and said: "Quit that; I want to see what's wrong."

Seeing the fallen man, she said: "Get him up, boys, and get him into the parlour."

She ran back to Jim and, taking his hand away from the tap, surveyed his knuckles.

She said: "Jim, we must see how far that fellow's hurt—get that disinfectant out; ain't there any? Gee, I'll get mine."

She went up the stairs into her room. She got a pillow, a towel; her sponge. She was not going to have any disquieting episode attach itself to the café.

The man was laid on the floor, the pillow under his head. She told one of the men to get a basin of water, and then to the crowd who stood in the parlour and the verandah: "I reckon you can all quit now; and see here, none of you want to go shouting down Main Street about this show; no Sirree, you jest keep your mouths shut."

She was moving the man's head over the basin and began to sponge his face. The blood oozed up and ran away in a stream from his eyes as fast as she sponged it away. She turned to the two men who had stayed behind. She said: "I reckon we'd better get Doc Wilson along; maybe he's at home now. Phone up and say he's wanted at the café."

He saw her kneeling there, as he stood for a moment in the verandah, holding the Montana man's head in

one hand and squeezing the sponge over his face. She looked up at him but said nothing; only gave a little smile as much as to say: "You'll have a lot to say over this, but don't say it now."

He said: "Why on earth didn't someone send for the ambulance?"

Catherine said: "We don't want the whole town talking over what Jim's done."

Doc Wilson said: "Oh, Jim's done it, has he?"

Then after making an examination: "It's all right, but it's a near shave. He wants stitches in; we'll have to get him moved."

"Can't you do it right here?"

He looked at her and motioned to her to move the basin and fill it with fresh water. There were other things he wanted. She fetched them. She had not realised that Jim had all this time remained in the kitchen. Now going out there to fill the basin, she went up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

She said: "It's all right, Jim."

Jim did not speak. He looked at her. She returned his look. His eyes were glowing. His silence now was not the silence of sullenness. It was as though something which was not part of his nature at all was uppermost. A kind of glory belonging only to the conqueror. Or as though he had landed on a stage that was meant for other than himself, and he did not quite know whether he should remain there or not. He felt strange. Doc Wilson was calling from the

parlour for something. Catherine went back to him.

Before he left, Doc Wilson said: "I'll have an auto sent round from the Corona for him; you don't want him lying around here all evening. Is this the fellow they call Davis?"

Jim said: "Sure."

"Well, I guess you'll have to steer clear of that crowd for a bit."

Jim said: "I'm not steering clear of any — that says what that guy said of Catherine, not if I lay the whole damn bunch in the gutter. They'll get it every time. He asked for it anyway."

Doc Wilson said: "And you're asking for what is being said. No man has a right to get a girl to live with him in his house; why don't you let her go?"

"I kaint."

"Haven't you any spunk?"

"No."

"Haven't you any honour?"

"I guess not."

"Then what have you got?"

Jim said: "What the Hell is that to you?"

He went up to his room. He lay on the bed. He looked at his broken knuckles. Catherine had dusted them with boracic powder, but it had more or less got brushed off. She had told him she would bind up his

hand, but he would not trust himself at present to having her fingers touch his own. What an agony to bear. Spunk! Had he been born without this attribute to the ordinary man's nature?

Had he once possessed it and then parted with it of his own accord? Honour? Where did it begin and where did it end? He supposed it was possible for it to die a lingering death. Perhaps he'd begun to poison his years before, when he had, with an innocent magniloquence, told his mother his first lie. But, after all, wasn't a mother's affection a pose, when you could stand in front of her and know she was content with a lie, because to search for the truth would cause infinite bother? Hadn't her honour been at stake as well as his own at the time? And his father cursing him as though he had been a rat-catcher and an entirely different breed from himself. Shucks!

What was the good of it all? The knowledge of what a man could be only came as a tantalising fantasy.

He wondered whether persistence in the code with which Father Austin tried to imbue him could eventually revive his morality. But even if it revived, could he get Catherine to marry him when she had heard all that there was to be heard of him in Elk's Head.

Up against a brick wall whichever way he turned. Albeit, before he fell asleep, instead of facing the wall and imagining it to be insurmountable, he turned his

back to it and said aloud: "I'm damned if I won't fight the blasted thing out to the finish."

Could anything surpass the beauty of the October sunsets? Catherine felt that no longer could she sit on her bed and run her hand through Jim's socks, searching for possible holes; the fineness of the air in the evenings drew her out and she would pay a visit here, a visit there, for the sake of a stroll before it was time to cook the supper. She had lately made friends with a boy who had come from Toronto, and who worked in the Dominion Bank. With him she went for walks along the river, and they talked together of the impossibility of the West. Unless you got to one of the bigger towns. But Catherine shook her head. What was a Western town compared to any in the East? He knew them all, it seemed. He had seldom moved out of Ontario, but she liked hearing of all the places he had been to. He had had the choice of going to Montreal and he had chosen to come West, and Gee, wasn't he sorry now. Only he'd met Catherine, so he did not suppose after all he regretted it as much as he might.

She said: "I reckon you ought to get to know Doc Wilson; he's in with the Second Avenue bunch; they're different to the rest, though they're all packed up in dollar notes. Still, they have some dandy shows."

He said: "Do you go?"

She shook her head.

He said: "Then I guess I'm not too keen to join in."

She said: "It will be a long way better for you than to go getting mixed up with the crowd that come to the café. They're all right, but I reckon they're a bit rough to the people you've come from Toronto way. I'll phone Doc Wilson and get him to keep a look-out for you; once you get mixed up with the wrong bunch in this place, you can't get out of it."

He said: "Why should you bother?"

She said: "I've seen enough dandy fellows going under; you get covered before you know where you are."

She kept her word, and one evening when Jim was out she rang Doc Wilson up. He answered the phone himself. She put her order through, as it were, all in one breath. "Say—is that Doc Wilson—this is Catherine Patterson speaking—there's a young fellow—Leonard Krauss come to live here—he's in the Dominion from Toronto—that's the way I got to know him. I reckon he wants putting on his feet, else he'll start in with the wrong crowd, see—and I thought maybe if you met him anywhere around you might push him on to the folks down your way, see—he's a dandy youngster—you'll like him——"

"Sure, but I'd like to hear more about him if he's as dandy as all that. Supposing I come around now and we'll go off by the river somewhere."

"I reckon it'll be cold."

"Is that so? A bear rug will solve that difficulty."

Oh, what a pity she had done it! Here she was, feeling all queer at the sound of his voice, and she knew that she would sit beside him in the auto as silent as a mule. But it couldn't be helped. How long was it since she had sat beside him and watched his hands as they held the wheel? And had he offered to come so that he might increase his interest in Leonard Krauss? After all he made it his business to keep an eye on these youngsters who came West.

Now here he was, for she heard his auto outside. She was just in the act of descending the stairs when she saw him standing at the foot. He laughed at her surprise at seeing him there and said: "You're such an elusive person, I thought if I waited outside I wouldn't know if you'd gone out somewhere else."

She came down saying: "You're sure anxious to hear all about Leonard. I reckon you'll take him clean off my hands." And then: "I only have them when no one else can do anything with them."

He said: "You must have a heart like steel."

He stood where he was, not attempting to make a move, so Catherine motioned with her hand towards the parlour, and at the same time asked him if the Montana fellow had been seen anywhere around since the smash-up.

He said: "I don't exactly search the side-walks when I'm driving around——"

She put in quickly: "For the kinder folks that come to the café."

"Exactly," he said, "for any that go to the café. I have found out at last that the only way to meet anyone I want to, is to come direct to the café."

She thought: "I'm going to let that go." And said: "Is that so?"

He looked down at her. He said: "Well, isn't it?"

The speed of the auto induced silence between them. Well away from the town he slowed down a bit and said: "The prairie seems to be our consulting-room. Let's see, who is it we've to puzzle our heads over this time?"

"I only want you to get Leonard moved into that set down your way. He won't do any good hanging around the café."

"And has he been hanging around the café?"

Catherine did not answer, for she felt that he was not making the smallest exertion to pretend that he had come out with the intention of really puzzling his head over Leonard Krauss or anyone else.

He asked her: "Can you tell me when you ever worry about yourself?"

She said: "I reckon I don't need to."

"You just leave that for other people to do."

She said: "I reckon no one wants to worry over me any."

He said: "In a way you're right, but I just get crazed wondering what you're doing it for."

She said: "You've no reason to get crazed over what I do."

"No?"

She was sitting aloof from him, her knees jammed against each other, her hands in her lap.

He said: "It need not necessarily be reason that gets me crazed."

He watched her. Her defiance had gone. But even so, he could not be sure that it might not return within a moment of time. Before it could reassert itself he leant over her and said: "Catherine, you've got to do it; you've got to quit the café. I'll see Arundale through. Father Austin and I will stand by him every moment we can."

She turned round on him fiercely and cried: "Let me be."

He said: "No, I will not let you be. Have I the name in Elk's Head for letting things be?"

"I know—I know; you do a powerful lot of good; you ought to understand."

She seemed to be crying now a little desperately to him. He looked away from her, and at the same moment put his hand out and covered her's.

Presently he said: "If I make you a promise will you make me one?"

She did not answer and he saw her pausing as though lost in thought.

He went on: "I will not worry you any more, I promise that, if you'll do your best to get round the idea of leaving the café. You know what you're doing to Jim, you're putting salt on his tongue and holding a glass of water just out of his reach. A man may submit to that, but only because he is being hypnotised. One day it's bound to send him crazy."

Catherine said: "Jim's like a child to me."

"A child! Good God! Catherine, why don't you marry and have a child of your own."

It was an outburst and in no wise a calculated command. He still had his hand over hers. She was looking down on it now. Then she closed her eyes and thought: "I jest want to know the feeling of it; seeing it as well is jest too much."

But it was a mistake, for as soon as she shut her eyes she seemed to see Nettie's baby as it had lain in her lap.

The baby—the baby.

She did not know she had begun to cry. Not until she was conscious of pulling her hands away from his in order that she might cover her face. At her movement he turned. He put one arm round her and tried

to take her hands in his again. Of her own accord she leant against his shoulder.

He said: "I've bullied you, Catherine. I sure want to help you, but you make it mighty hard."

He was pressing her very gently against himself. He had taken her hand and was holding it against his lips.

She was thinking: "This isn't happening really. I reckon I'm dreaming."

But she was not. He had let her hand go now and was pressing her against him with both his arms round her and was kissing her forehead very, very gently.

When he let her go he said: "You know I'll be the winner in the end."

She smiled at him. "What do you bet?"

He said: "Everything I've got."

CHAPTER XV

THE snow began to fall in the middle of November. Almost before people had had time to enter into the spirit of the coming winter there came a severe outbreak of 'flu. There were just a few cases way over the west side of the river at first, and after a lull of a week or two it spread all around, until it came across the Saskatchewan, sweeping through the town until it reached the farthest bungalows way up on the hill. Its severity was an enigma, for, in a place where deaths were few and far between, through December there were more than could be counted with ease.

For one week there was little hope for any, once their temperature began to rise. The stores were devoid of customers. Neighbour nursed neighbour. As each recovered he would take his turn with the next who fell sick. The convalescents strayed to the café with their accustomed regularity. Perhaps it was the only place where business did not slacken. Catherine's hopes rose considerably, for the proceeds were vast and it seemed that Jim's prospects were secured in that he could be shipped back to England in the spring, his debts paid, and quite a little capital to carry on. And now that it seemed such a possible feat she talked to him about it, hinting to him that she would probably

be moving farther West herself. She would like to sample British Columbia—she had never really meant to stay in a one-horse place like Elk's Head.

She said: "What do you see here—what do you hear? It's like digging up the same potato every time. I don't mind betting you once across the water you'll forget every damn thing that's happened in this hole. You'll sure feel somebody different. Even if your own people are dead, there'll be heaps of others that'd be glad to see you. You just get across there and you'll forget everything——"

He looked at her: intensely as he often did: without moving and as though he were afraid to breathe.

He said very quietly: "Not everything, Catherine. I've gone so far as to forget God, but I reckon I'll never forget you."

She said: "You've no call to forget God, Jim. God ain't forgotten you."

She spoke rather as though he were someone to be envied.

They sat quiet for a few minutes, Jim smoking, Catherine thinking. Presently he put out his cigarette, though it was nowhere near finished. He leant his arm on the table and rested his head in his hand.

Catherine noticed he was shivering. She said: "Say, Jim, you don't feel queer?"

He said: "I sure do, Catherine."

She went to him and put her arm round him. She said: "I reckon you'd better get along up to bed."

He did not move for a moment, so she urged him: "Get a move on, Jim, you're not looking very good."

He rose then and she went in front of him up the stairs. By the time he came into the room she had turned his bed down for him ready to get into.

She said: "You must have a hot drink, Jim, and jest keep as warm as you can all night—you don't want to go getting the 'flu."

But she knew he had caught it already. She had heard of the suddenness with which it had taken hold of the people who had recovered and been since to the café. She'd ring up Doc Wilson right away, though someone had told her he was seldom in the house now. He was going his rounds from the East to the West, from the North across the bridge to the South. Still she must let him know. She rang up.

He was out, but Jim's name would be put down on the list. If Jim was going to be bad she would close the café. They could afford to close for a day or two. Or she might get in one or two of the more trustworthy boys to get along with it and keep it going until Jim might be about again. If she could get his temperature down after it once rose; she knew this to be the most important thing; and then the nourishment, light but sufficient, to support his strength. She reckoned half the people had died because the other half had not known what to do in the emergency. The kettle boiled up in no time. She fetched a blanket off her own bed;

warmth was so important. She hurried around, hardly realising that she was subconsciously in her element. She crept into his room three times during the night, and by six o'clock the next morning she had made him a cup of tea. She lifted him up from the pillow, shook it and turned it, then rested him back on it once again so that he said: "Gee, that's good."

She said: "You ain't feeling too bad, Jim?"

"No," he said, "not too bad."

She felt him. Smoothed the hair back from his head. Once again encircled his wrist with her fingers.

He was quite cool. She laughed: "I reckon you'll be a record case—Doc Wilson will have his journey for nothing."

Jim smiled. He said something, but his voice was a bit weak, so that Catherine leant over him and he said it again. "Catherine," he said, "you're great."

But all the same for several days he was seriously ill. Catherine decided it was best after all to close the café, partly on account of infection, and Doc Wilson gave her to understand that for the next few days Jim would want careful attention.

He advised her as to taking precaution against catching it herself. She was to gargle and, above all things, she was to feed up and avoid getting run down.

She looked at him all the time he was speaking. As he finished she exclaimed: "Oh Gee! You look all done in."

He smiled and said: "Forty-eight hours in the twenty-four; it's been fierce."

She said: "I wish I could have helped."

He looked at her and said: "You have."

Jim had nearly recovered, and they had both decided that the café would re-open the following day, when Catherine became ill. Through the day she had felt her spirit flattening out under an extraordinary depression. The little shivers which came and went were like minute omens of disaster, which she tried to drive away and could not. By tea time she had to admit to Jim, though unwillingly, that she was all in.

He saw at once that this was undoubtedly true. She had nursed him so well that his strength had returned extraordinarily quickly, so now, though she protested, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to her room. He then went downstairs and made the tea as quickly as he could, following her example of giving the one who was sick something hot to drink.

He, too, fetched from his bed an extra blanket and saw that she was sufficiently warm.

She said: "I guess I'll see how I am in the morning before you send for Doc Wilson—maybe it's only a slight go. If you run around to Mrs Robinson she'd come around; she's had it."

Jim said: "I reckon I'd rather not run any risks, Catherine; you're not looking any too good."

"Maybe he'd want me to be moved to the Hospital, Jim, and I wouldn't want that."

This suggestion for a moment made Jim think. He said: "I'll do anything you want, Catherine; but I reckon there may be things that I kaint do."

She had finished the tea now and was lying down.

Jim thought: "I reckon she wants a woman around." But he knew that even of a woman he would be fiercely jealous. To get her through all on his own—that was what he greatly desired. To have no other hand but his own to tend her. It would be like Doc Wilson to have her moved away to the Hospital. Rather than have that he would inquire whether there was a nurse to spare, who could come around to the café.

He was willing a thousand times over to pay the fee.

But it would not do not to let Doc Wilson know. He'd phone right away.

He was told that Doc Wilson had fallen a victim himself that morning and there was no possible hope of him coming around. But the other man would do his best at taking over as many of Doc Wilson's patients as possible. Jim went back to Catherine's room and told her the news.

She thought at once: "It will hit him badly; he's been all in for weeks." But he was very strong; nothing would happen to him. Then she thought of Ted Brown, who had been known as one of the strongest men in Elk's Head, and he had been taken off after twenty-four

hours of it. What a thought to bear on the top of feeling like this. Her head gave a sudden throb like a horse which moves forward when it has reached the summit of a hill. If only all things would cease which caused turmoil. There seemed no reason why the difficulties of life should so easily come about. There was so much land that was not bog and yet one found oneself embedded in the bog.

And it was as though people might say: "But there's plenty of dry land here; why stick there when you could very well come over here?"

If they both recovered, all she would have to do would be to phone him up and suggest a drive along by the river and tell him she had decided to let Jim carry on without her; the work anyway was too much.

She was always more fagged than she allowed. But there was Jim working around in the kitchen below. The thought of him working alone brought her back to the reality of the bog. How could she leave Jim? And anyway—she shivered. The bog! She was embedded in the bog all right.

Jim made some lemonade and left it beside her on the table for the night. He suggested moving his mattress into her room and sleeping on the floor. He was afraid if she wanted anything in the night he might not hear her if she called. But Catherine would not hear of it.

The next morning Jim suggested he should fetch Mrs Robinson in case there was anything Catherine

might want doing, but she said she'd hate anyone messing around. She seemed no worse, though it was obvious her temperature had not dropped as much as it might.

The doctor who had taken over Doc Wilson's work phoned to ask whether Catherine's case was severe. He did not know if he could look in before evening, but he'd do his best.

Jim did for Catherine exactly what she had done for him. Only in a clumsier way. Or perhaps it was because his hands were shaking. She seemed to fall asleep while he was drying her hands, and he noticed for the first time her extraordinary exhaustion.

She made no movement all afternoon, and Jim had to rouse her when he poured out the tea. But she did not seem able to rouse. So he knelt down beside her bed and put his arm under her. He said: "I reckon this will do you good, Catherine; jest see if you kaint take a little."

He held the cup to her lips and she took a sip or two. She smiled at him. He said: "Drink some more, Catherine, maybe it'll get your temperature down."

She drank what was left in the cup. When he put the cup down she said: "Have you heard how he is?"

Jim said: "Doc Wilson?"

"Yes——"

"I'll phone, Catherine; I'll do anything you want, Catherine."

She looked at him, and though perhaps hardly conscious, she loved him for that moment as much as anyone had ever loved him. She was in need of care and love herself, and she was alone in the world. The week before she had given him the care a mother or wife might have bestowed on him. He had depended solely on her for everything. They were indeed two derelicts of chance given to each other in time of need. She looked at him. She had spoken the few words her strength would allow for the other, and now she had none left to say anything more. And yet she wanted to convey to him that her desolation had been eased and she did not feel forsaken by all, because he was there by her side. He thought she was asking for something and leant over her. But she was asking for nothing. She looked at him for a moment longer and then spoke his name twice.

"Jim," she said; "Jim."

He did not know what to do, for the doctor had not made an appearance and, if he phoned, Jim could not say that Catherine was really any worse. He knew that the thing had to run its course.

He was relieved to find that towards ten o'clock her temperature seemed to drop. When he laid his hand on her head she had broken out into a perspiration and felt quite cool. And yet he did not know why he felt uneasy about her. Maybe it was the strangeness of seeing her lie there helpless, when he was so accustomed

to her unwavering energy. He could, of course, go out and get in a neighbour who would sit up with her. But this suggestion only prompted him to endeavour to see her through her illness entirely unaided.

He determined he would fetch one of the lounge chairs from the parlour and bring it up to her room so that he could sit there through the night. Probably in an hour or two she would take a turn for the better. All the time he was soliloquising over her condition he was thinking: "I'd best get in Mrs Robinson or somebody or other——" But he did so wish to feel he was doing this for Catherine unaided. He heard someone now down in the verandah.

He wondered who it could be. He went down the stairs and found one of the men who frequented the café as often as any. He had heard that Catherine was bad and he wondered if there was anything he could do.

Jim felt relieved. He said: "Her temperature dropped a while ago." And then hesitatingly: "Come up and see what you think about her—I guess I'm no hand at this game, Mike."

They both went up to Catherine's room, the two of them carrying the lounge chair which Jim suggested sleeping in. They placed it down just inside the door and then tiptoed over to Catherine.

Mike said: "I reckon the fever's gone; if I was you I'd have some brandy by; it wouldn't hurt any to give her a spot; it'd kinder pick her up."

Jim said: "Brandy?"

Mike said: "Yes, got any?"

Jim shook his head.

Mike said: "I gotta bottle round at my shack; Catherine's welcome to it. I sure hate to see a dandy girl like Catherine laid low this way. I'll go right home now and bring it around."

Jim said: "Thanks."

Mike was not gone long and very soon returned with the brandy. Jim heard him as he stepped across the verandah and went half-way down the stairs. He was grateful to Mike. He told him so. He said: "I'm sure grateful to you, Mike. I was just getting all fussed up about Catherine."

Mike said: "Why, sure, that's nothing. I reckon you ought to get a doctor in in the morning; she don't look too good."

Jim put the bottle down on the stairs and went after Mike so that he might fetch a tumbler and a spoon from the kitchen. He said good night to Mike, and Mike jammed his stetson on his head and said good night to Jim. Jim felt the spirit of optimism and strength returning to him. Albeit he was feeling very fatigued. Anxiety over somebody else's welfare was a new experience. However, the anxiety would be lessened in quite a short time now. He felt that Mike had been quite right. There was nothing like brandy after a physical collapse.

He thought he had better draw the cork down in the kitchen, so fetched the bottle from the stairs. It was like Mike to fetch along a new bottle like this. He was ever noted for his generosity of heart. He gave the cork-screw a twist down through the cork. How easily it went in. Round and round he screwed it until he thought it had gone through far enough, and so he held the bottle firmly in his left hand and gave a pull at the cork-screw. He was getting the cork out without breaking it. That was good. A muffled pop then and the smell of the brandy came floating upwards. It was like chloroform in the way that it sent him reeling into a world of delightful unconsciousness. For a moment he seemed to wonder, 'Where am I?' And by asking himself the question he remembered why he had descended thus to the kitchen. A spoon, of course, he wanted. And a tumbler. What a relief to think that perhaps in an hour's time Catherine would have revived and would once more be on the way to recovery.

Catherine! How he loved her. And how he hated other women. The harlots of the past. He shuddered. And he had wanted them. Could stand their livid faces close to his own. God, how could he? The memory of their mouths made him sick.

He poured a little of the brandy into the glass, and kneeling down he dished a teaspoonful up and let it trickle through Catherine's lips. A little ran down her chin and he wiped it away. Then endeavoured again

to get her to swallow a little more. Just half a teaspoonful at a time until he reckoned she had had enough. Then he sat back in his chair so that he might keep his vigil.

She had seemed to nestle her head in a more comfortable way into the pillow so that she looked more natural than when she had been lying still upon her back without moving. Jim sat quite still in the chair and kept his eyes on her. It was curious how he could sit like that beside the one woman in the world who had ever counted, and be content. Surely it could not be that the more you loved a woman the less you wanted her. Yet that was how it seemed to be. He would like just now to kiss her hand, but he had covered her up with the bed-clothes to the chin so that after the sweating out of the fever she should not take cold. So he just reached across from the chair and laid his lips on her forehead. Almost as though it were the pact with which he wished to seal his service to her. Then he sat back once again and leant his head against the corduroy cushion with which the back of the chair was upholstered.

He again became conscious of the smell of the brandy. It was coming from the remains in the tumbler which was standing on a table just between him and Catherine's bed. He felt very tired. Not with sleep, but just physically and mentally very, very tired.

And yet he was not so conscious of his weariness as of the smell of the brandy which was being wafted

over to him. He began to ruminate, and in ruminating he suddenly discovered that for months past he had been living in a fool's paradise. He had imagined he had been happy, but on looking backwards—why, he wanted to laugh out loud about it. He was floating upwards now. Upwards—upwards. There was no such time as yesterday; there was only today. And even the hours of today were past and the only time that counted at all was now—now. With the smell of the brandy floating over to him out of the glass by Catherine's bedside. No, it was not Catherine's bedside. It was nobody's bedside, for nobody existed in the world but himself, and the smell that was being wafted—wafted.

Where was it coming from? The glass? He reached out for it. Yes, from the glass. But there was practically nothing in it. There was more somewhere. Somewhere. Presently he would remember where. Of course! He remembered now. Down beside him. He put his hand out. Yes, it was there. And the bottle was heavy, for it was full. Who had brought it?

Mike. Might God bless Mike for as long as he trod the earth. Good old Mike. Here was the tumbler full. Full! He raised it to his lips and drank. Down in a mouthful or two as though it had been water.

And as refreshing. Then he filled it up again. And again. He did not know how many times. But what did it matter? As long as he could fill it up. That was the main thing. The main thing. He did not care

about anything else. There was nothing else to care about. Nothing in this world.

Nothing.

And so they both slept. She, as one whose life has been restored, and he as one whose life has long been spent.

CHAPTER XVI

HE had slithered off the chair and lay half-propped against the bed, as one who, in drowning, will somehow reach the place of safety as they sink.

So Catherine saw him when she woke. She felt a little stronger after her long sleep, so she raised her head and looked her full. The empty bottle on the floor had rolled a yard or two away. The glass, too, had fallen from his hand and was standing erect by the chair as the one thing intact saved from the wreck.

She tried to sit up, but had quickly to lie back on the pillow again, for her head was reeling.

She wanted to rouse him, for the sooner he moved and got into the fresh air the better. She began to remember dimly what had been happening the day before. It was hard. It must have been Jim that washed her. She remembered the sponge on her face.

And her hands. She remembered the relief the sponging of her hands had been. She called to him: "Jim—Jim." But he did not move. She wondered, "Who for the land's sake brought that brandy in? I'll murder whoever it was." If only she could reach over to him and rouse him up a bit. She wondered how long it would be before she could get out of bed

and help him to his feet. And all the time she was saying to herself: "This ain't a breakout; it's jest that he's all in."

It was extraordinary how she felt optimistic like this, for her weakness was overwhelming. She lay there hour after hour calling to Jim, but he slept on, propped up against the bed. Her mind left him at times and travelled farther afield. Out along Main Street, over the track to Second Avenue. She felt certain somehow that Doc Wilson was on the mend. She could not tell why, or for what reason the world seemed so extraordinarily fair. With her lying like that, helpless and needing intolerably a little nourishment. As soon as Jim roused up he would recover himself. He'd sure been a good pal while she had lain ill. Outside she heard the tinkle of the horses' bells as the sleighs went down Forty-ninth Street. She wondered whether anyone would call. She was beginning to feel famished, and her tongue and throat were parched. Now there was someone knocking on the door downstairs. Perhaps finding no one answered the knock, whoever it might be would come into the parlour, and she could call out to them. She lifted her head from the pillow once more and tried sitting up. She thought: "I reckon this feeling will go off soon."

She endeavoured to lean across and touch Jim's head.

"Jim," she said; "Jim."

And now whoever had been knocking had come

in. Catherine called out: "Say, could you come right up?"

A man's voice answered: "Sure."

It was Mike. He stood in the doorway and looked down at Jim. Catherine said: "Are you the guy that brought the brandy to Jim?"

He said, and regretfully: "Ah—ah."

Catherine said: "You sure gotta heap gumption, you have."

He said, defending himself: "I reckon I wasn't thinking of Jim last night; we was both thinking of you, Catherine."

She said: "Well, I reckon your thinking ain't done a powerful amount of good."

He said: "You've picked up mighty quick; we both thought as how you were travelling West last night."

But Catherine's heart did not soften. She said: "I'd be glad of some tea, if you've a mind to make me some; maybe a cup would rouse Jim up."

She lay back on her pillow, a little exhausted.

Mike began to do what she asked him. He made his way down to the kitchen, and Catherine heard him clumsily moving about. Presently he came up with the tray loaded. The cups rattled, piled together. He had not forgotten one for himself. And he cut Catherine some bread and butter. He set the tray on the table by the bed. He poured a cup out, filling it plentifully with milk, and gave it to Catherine.

She said: "Leave it on the tray, I'll reach out for it."

She took the cup up in her hand and sipped the tea. She said: "Gee, that's good." Then: "Do you think you could get Jim up and put him on the chair?"

Mike attempted to rouse Jim. Quite suddenly Jim opened his eyes and sat up. He looked round him and made no remark of surprise at seeing Mike and Catherine sipping out of their cups. He seemed to take the assemblage as a matter of course.

Mike said: "Have a cuppa tea, Jim?"

Jim still sat on the floor, gazing in front of him as though he had much to think about.

Catherine put her cup down and leant across the bed till she could reach Jim. Then she told Mike to hand her the spare cup. He filled it for her. She held it to Jim's lips and said: "Here, Jim, drink this." After the first sip he put his hand out as if to hold the cup himself. Catherine said: "Can you hold it yourself, Jim?"

He said quite sensibly: "Sure."

They were all quiet sipping their tea. When Jim had finished he put his cup down and began very slowly to get up from the floor. He did it in stages. First to his knees, so that even kneeling like that he reeled a little forward, but saved himself by putting his hand out and holding on to the chair.

Catherine stretched out her arm as though she were able to aid him in his endeavour to rise up from the

ground. He turned towards her extended arm and, still kneeling, fell across the bed.

Catherine immediately felt her optimism ooze from her. She took up one of Jim's hands and patted it. She found she could not speak for a moment or two. But presently she said: "Buck up, Jim, I reckon you'll be a heap better if you get outside for a bit."

Then she turned to Mike. She said: "If you could get Mrs Robinson to come in for a bit, I reckon she could hold her tongue and maybe make some soup and cook a dinner for Jim. But don't for Mercy's sake go telling the folk around that Jim's this way."

She was beginning to feel very weary now, and leant up against the wall at the side of the bed.

As soon as Mike went downstairs, Jim knelt up, keeping hold of Catherine's hand. His eyes were bloodshot and his hair was tumbled. His good looks were coarsened since the previous day. He was pitiable. But it did not seem as though she were ready to mete out pity to him, but something far more vigorous.

She said: "Well, I guess we gotta get over this trouble and both of us hitch on to the wagon again. Eh, Jim?"

He was holding her hand against him and looking down vacantly at the coverlet on the bed.

"You don't need to look so mighty glum over last night, Jim."

He seemed then to fall towards her so that his head

struck her breast. She held it there. She stroked his head.

He said: "You won't leave me, Catherine?"

"Sure no, what made you think that?"

"I don't know where I am, Catherine. I feel as if I jest kaint go on with this darned café show."

"Oh, I reckon that's because you've had the 'flu. We gotta make a pile of money yet, so's you can get back to the old country."

"I kaint leave you, Catherine."

"That's all right, Jim; you've no call to look on the gloomy side of things; you get out into the fresh air a bit, or go in on your bed and have a sleep."

He said: "All right, I reckon I will."

A little later Mrs Robinson made an appearance. As soon as she saw Catherine she exclaimed: "For Mercy's sake, why didn't you send Jim around for me yesterday?"

Catherine said: "He thought he'd do a bit of nursing himself, and he was all in, too, after being ill like he's been. Then that mug, Mike Rawlings, goes and fetches a bottle of brandy along. Gee! Ain't that a fool of a man?"

Mrs Robinson picked up the straying bottle and the glass on the floor, and pushed the lounge chair away from the side of the bed. She shook Catherine's pillows up and straightened the coverlet.

Catherine said: "Have you heard how Doc Wilson is?"

"Going on fine."

Catherine said: "I don't want him to know that Jim's this way; better not say anything about it to anybody."

"Surely. Well, I'm going right home to fetch you along a drop of soup. Have you got any eggs in the place?"

Catherine said: "Seems I don't remember anything these last two days. Oh Gee, I did feel bad, and Jim was just cute the way he looked after me."

Mrs Robinson said: "I reckon you'll be looking after Jim for a bit."

Catherine said: "Do you reckon he's going to be bad?"

Mrs Robinson grimaced, as though it were not for her to say.

CHAPTER XVII

It was practically impossible to save him now. The Corona claimed him for her own. He returned like a lover to a long-forsaken mistress, remembering her wiles the very instant her touch was upon him. He had been faithless, but now he would atone for his faithlessness. How could he ever have been persuaded to forget her? Oh, how unaccountable were the ways of men!

And, indeed, how unaccountable were the ways of women, for, where he acknowledged he was forfeiting the right to Catherine's comradeship, she elected to live on with him as his comrade. He was sober seldom enough to acknowledge his gratitude.

He sneaked out in the morning and back again the following morning. Sometimes he would give the mornings a miss and return in the afternoon. Catherine was always there to open the door, for she did not want to give anyone the chance of seeing him fumble with the door handle, as they might in passing down the street. She discovered that the one thing which forsook men in Jim Arundale's plight was penitence. They seemed to persist in bravado and abuse. She found either unendurable, albeit endured them. After three days she seemed to think the only

thing was to resign herself with fortitude and await events.

She had certainly threatened to leave Jim, once he broke through the traces, but she knew herself that that was the very opposite of her intention.

As soon as she was well enough, she re-opened the café, for she trusted to Elk's Head being loyal to her, however they might feel towards Jim. So a week after her recovery business continued as usual, and no mention was made by anyone as to why Jim was always absent. Catherine secured a boy to help her with the rough work, and so carried on alone. She knew that it was absolutely hopeless trying to talk to Jim in his present state. The bout must run its course before the moment came in which she could use her influence.

She was willing to wait. Though, perhaps, not willing but certainly determined. She was prepared later on, if Jim showed no signs of recuperating, to meet opposition from all sides. What would they all think about her?

They had all seen the reason of her achievement in the past, but if that achievement began to wane, what would they say then? They would all say, and truthfully, that it was a mug's game to coin money for a man to swill absinthe with. It sure was. A mug. No one would ever dream you had a set purpose in being a mug. She had said to them before: "I know what I'm about." And she had shown them how true were her words. She had built the café up and made

it a business. She wondered whether Doc Wilson would keep his promise now and give up his endeavour to break down her insistence. He had promised he would not bully her again. But only on condition she would apply to him in need. He, of them all, would consider her a mug. She did not mind what the rest of Elk's Head thought about her, but she did not wish Doc Wilson to think she was just a crazy woman, who didn't know what she was about. Now and again she thought: "I reckon I'll tell him for why." It would not matter if he knew. In fact, better if she ended the chance of his ever wanting her to go driving with him along by the river. Or perhaps when the snow no longer covered the prairie, she would go just for the last time and tell him then. With the auto drawn up in the accustomed spot, the Saskatchewan rushing past them, and the prairie all around.

Often in the evenings when she was alone she would stand by the telephone and think. Just to twist the dial around and there he'd be at the other end. If she could speak to him. But what was the good of that unless it was to say what she really had to say. The sleighs driven by in the dark, the bells tinkling on the horses, gave her a sense of being so entirely alone. After all, Jim had been a pleasant companion. She knew that now. A dear companion.

She could not have imagined a human being changing as Jim had changed in a week. The devastating pity

of it. Well, now there was another sleigh being driven past. Those bells! As they got fainter and fainter they just made you feel about as queer as anything could. Kinder chokey. As though maybe you could go away somewhere and have a good cry. If Martha Jackson could look in. But there she was, forty-seven miles away, buried in the snow. And there was the telephone hanging on the wall. Twist the dial around three times. Four-four-six. Say, is that Doc Wilson? Speaking. She heard him. *Speaking*. Well, she reckoned if she did hear him she'd never have courage to say anything further. But the insistence to turn the dial came back again. Four-four——. Now here was her finger inserted over the number. A pressure to the right and let it fly back. Again and then the six. He answered immediately as though he had been there ready waiting.

“Hello.”

“Hello. Say, is that Doc Wilson?”

“Sure.”

“This is Catherine Patterson.”

She heard him say quickly: “Are you wanting me?”

“I reckon I'd like to speak to you about something. I'll come right around.”

She was leaning against the wall. And then moving a step or two forward she caught hold of the back of the chair and steadied herself. That seemed to bring her to her senses. She caught hold of it with the other

hand and closed her eyes. When she opened them she said aloud: "I reckon it won't be so bad."

It was almost a relief to get outside in the cold. It was hard to walk. Even in her rubbers her feet kept on slipping back, so that her progress was slow. It would take her a bit longer if she kept away from Main Street, but she did not mind, because it would be better than running into people she would rather not meet. She seemed to arrive there, even so, in a wonderfully quick time, and she supposed it was because her thoughts were far away.

Here she was at his door and there, but a yard or two away, were his sitting-room windows, the casement curtain drawn, and the light just glancing through. He was in there. Just behind those panes of glass. She leant against the door and closed her eyes. He was so near. Before, something had kept him a certain distance away. He had seemed all along just Doc Wilson. Now, as she opened her eyes again, she saw the brass plate by the side of his door. Doctor Walter J. Wilson. What folly indeed to speak his name. She was suddenly conscious of the cold. Best ring the bell. She rang it.

He must have been in all alone, for he came to the door himself to let her in. Unless he had been listening for her footsteps. He said nothing to her, but put his hand through her arm and led her into his room. He

pulled up a chair, but before she sat down in it he told her to take off her coat and hat. It was curious to stand there doing just what he told her to do, and never murmur or tell him she reckoned she'd do so if she felt inclined.

She pulled off her gloves. Her fingers were stiff with the cold. He saw they were and took up her hands so that the warmth of his should melt her own. She knew he was looking at her, but she did not raise her eyes to his, for she felt that her strength would not last out. He said quietly: "Sit down."

She sat down, very wearily. She did not sit back, but a little forward, her hands in her lap, her wrists held together. She did not see that he glanced down and then quickly up at her face. He did not speak, so she spoke to him. Looking full up at him she said: "I reckon you've heard about Jim?"

He said curtly: "Sure, I have."

She said: "I reckon I'd have gone out that night, if he hadn't given me the brandy—he saved my life, that's a sure thing. It was that gink, Mike Rawlings, that brought around the bottle—it started Jim off, and now he can't stop." She said again, as though above all things she wanted to impress him with the fact: "I reckon he saved my life."

Doc Wilson said: "Is that what you have come round here to tell me?"

Catherine said: "You promised you wouldn't bully me any more about quitting the café, and I promised

you I'd kinder think over things and come around and tell you——"

"I see."

"If it costs me everything I've got, I can't quit Jim Arundale: that's what I came around to tell you."

"I see." And then: "Why do you always sit with your hands that way?"

She looked quickly down at her hands. And then she looked at him.

"I reckon you know——"

He drew in a deep breath.

"When?"

"Two years ago."

"Where?"

"Quebec—way."

"What for?"

She said: "Shooting my husband."

CHAPTER XVIII

SHE looked at him with resignation. The sort of resignation that an animal might have in its eyes when it knows that at last it has been trapped and forced into submission.

She said: "Didn't you hear of the Martinez case out this way?"

He frowned, as though endeavouring to recollect. She urged his memory. "You remember—they gave me ten years, but after a year and a half, the man that gave it to me died, and it got around that he'd paid a witness that didn't know a thing about it. I made out I did it in self-defence, and I'd have got off easy but for that guy that had been at me all the summer. He told a heap of lies about how I'd threatened to shoot Joseph. A guy called Orlando Gane. We'd been pretty good friends when I first went out on the farm. He was a better class than the rest, the only one I cared to speak to. He was crazy to get money, and yet there was nothing he could do to get any. Got mighty ideas of living at swell hotels. He lived in a shack half a mile away, and he used to come over whenever he got the chance. He got mad with me because I wouldn't let him near me the times he felt like it."

Doc Wilson asked her: "Did you do it in self-defence?"

She shook her head. Then she went on: "My father died when I was twelve years old, and left my mother with a heaper debts to pay off and no money to do it with——"

Doc Wilson leant back in his chair. He rested his elbow on the table at his side and covered his eyes with his hand. He sat there and listened as Catherine told him of her life in Quebec with her mother. How they had worked. The satisfaction of paying off one debt after another, and especially the debt they owed to Winston Clark. Her infatuation for Clark and her disillusionment. The morning her mother went off to the Hospital, and Catherine's sudden determination to give her mother the best she could by offering herself to Martinez. Then she came to her life on the farm, the work and the degradation of living with a man like Martinez. The terror he inspired in her of himself and the other men around. The suddenness of the fit of d'spair which drove her to pick up the gun and fire it at Martinez in the way she had. The ride into Quebec—telling the police what she had done, and her first night in the cell. And then the trial: how she had stuck to her story of having shot Joseph in self-defence—she believed he had been drunk and it was a case of who could reach the gun first. She told Doc Wilson again she would have got off easy, but Winston——.

Doc Wilson looked up at her. He said, quickly: "Winston Clark?"

"Ah—ah. He was the judge. He'd never forgotten he'd wasted all that time in hunting me around and got smacked for his trouble. I don't know whether Orlando got him or he got Orlando; didn't matter anyway. Orlando seemed to scent that Winston wasn't too keen to let me off, and he just stepped up and said I'd never stopped gassing about how I was going to get rid of Joseph. Then jest as I'd done close on two years Winston died, and Orlando went and told them Winston had paid him a pretty good sum for putting up the tales he'd told about me. But when I was let out I knew I'd got off. I knew what I was about when I shot Joseph. I'd no call to do that, not to take his life. When I came to Elk's Head I heard all the talk about Jim, and someone said that they reckoned he wouldn't be so bad if someone gotta kind of hold of him and led him the way he oughter go. And I thought if I could do that for him it would kinder make up for taking Joseph's life and getting off the rest of the time. That's why I got so mighty glad he got bucked the way the café went. And if the 'flu hadn't come along, I'd reckoned I'd put by enough to ship him off to the old country, so's he'd make good there and pick up with a few decent folk."

Doc Wilson had got up from his chair and walked over to the window, then turned so that he was standing a yard or two behind Catherine's chair. He said:

"I'm afraid it's been a bit of a strain on you telling me all this. I think you have been splendid; everyone around knows that, the way you've run the café and paid Jim's debts. But you've done enough and more than enough, and more than anyone else could have done. Maybe even now he'll pull up again, but he has got to do it alone."

Somehow, he was talking now as though without a doubt he had the upper hand of them both. He had promised not to bully her. His tone now was not in the very least that of a bully, but of a dictator. And a dictator who, now that she came to think of it, was a little indifferent to the one to whom he was dictating. He continued: "I think if I am right he'll go the whole hog for the next six weeks, so the sooner you quit, the better."

As he spoke he laid his hand on the back of the chair in which she was sitting. She got up hurriedly and began to put on her things. "I reckon," she said, "if I'd known your memory was such a mighty poor one, I'd not have bothered to come round. See here, how'd it be if you write it down; maybe you'd remember it then. Catherine Patterson notified me she wouldn't quit Jim Arundale, not if her life depended on it."

He moved nearer to her, for she was backing towards the door. She did not see that his sang-froid was turning to fear. He said: "See here, Catherine, it's a mug's game."

"Sure," she said, "all women are mugs, else there'd be no men in the world."

She was standing now with her back against the door. He insisted once again: "You'll have to give in."

"Is that so?"

"You've no conception what Arundale will be like in a week's time."

"You're mighty wise."

Her defiance was a revelation. Doc Wilson stood back a step and, as it were, reviewed it.

"I believe," he said, and as though he had become as defiant as she, "you love him."

She cried to him as if her cry would bring her victory: "Maybe I do."

CHAPTER XIX

SHE had not faltered. But perhaps it was nothing to boast about. Even if she had indulged in wild dreams, he had very quickly dispersed them. And just by the tone of his voice. She had thought when she had started out on her way, that in all probability he would wring the story of her past out of her. But she had thought—oh, how foolish, how very, very foolish—it might be when he would have persuaded her to leave Jim for himself. She had so often told herself that he was the sort that went slow. He would allow his love to grow and grow until he was certain of its existence for all time. Not a waiting of desire, but of love's perfection. She had never known it before. Not in the same way. It had been sweet to think that he had made an excuse to drive her along by the river's bank. To talk of Jim! A farce that had been sweeter than serious. Before, men had eyed her and let her know in a moment what she could be really worth to them. Sitting by his side in the auto she had at last felt that she symbolised what she had before only imagined herself to be—a woman who could be looked up to, a woman, far removed from the audacious girl who commanded respect really by a fluke: for so often her audacity was a fluke by the merest chance. However

lofty her position was as queen of the café, she knew occasionally people must wonder why she was thus upholding the honour of a reprobate. Albeit, the reprobate had offered her nothing but the choicest of chivalry.

She would return to him. She would keep her word: she would see him through. That was, after all, what she had set out to tell this other. She had thought—and who could blame her—that to refuse his request that she should leave Jim for himself, would mean tearing her heart out of her body. But instead, she had flaunted a miserable lie before him in order to appease her pride. Her pride. She reckoned he'd think it waste of time for a woman who'd been in jail to imagine she had a right to possess any. Hatred now held sway in her mind. Hatred for mankind. The better they considered themselves, the meaner they seemed to be. They got possession of a woman's heart and soul on the instalment plan, paying gradually with wiles and persuasions for something they considered might belong to them eventually.

Some hope! Better to be with a derelict like Jim, who had nothing to pay out.

By the time she reached the café, however, her anger had spent itself. And her courage as well. Or so it seemed, for the moment she had closed the door she began to cry. Winston Clark had condemned her to ten years' penal servitude. Forthwith she had held for Clark disdain and hatred, both supportable, though

uncomfortable passions. But they were easier to possess than the passion of love and hatred combined.

But where tears will water love, until its growth will be refreshed, they will purge hatred away so that after her weeping Catherine no longer felt hatred for Walter Wilson. She even began to make excuses for him. Even if he had loved her, he could not possibly link himself up with a criminal. To have spent eighteen months in prison was, after all, practically the same as if she had spent the remaining eight and a half years. Once you had been in jail, the actual time you had done did not matter so very much. She was marked for life. Very fitting that she had linked herself up with a man who also possessed a stigma. After all, was it necessary to vaunt her pride so valiantly before the population of Elk's Head? She laughed. She'd put it over them, that was certain. Her name was a name in the town.

Pretty much the same as Doc Wilson's, or Father Austin's. You could well add Catherine Patterson's name to the end of the list.

Well, there it was. Another upheaval. A kind of compulsory command from fate to move on and not stand there dallying with the idea that life was a pleasurable thing. The supposition that it might be, had grown perhaps like a weed without encouragement. Well, anyway it had been rooted up and she must take care that it never grew again.

. Sparseness in life was what should be encouraged, for

sparseness was preferable to the agony of rooting up and throwing away. Better, after all, to possess one plant and tend it well, in the hope its life would last, than to have a garden full of thistledown which, when the first breeze came, would blow away. Who could have been more certain than she that Wilson was her friend? What was the good of holding out your hand only to have it taken and then dropped. Just a cutting wound in life that would go on bleeding for a goodish while. And to have the nature that doesn't quite know how to go about the tying up of the wound. That was the worst part of it. To go on up to her room saying to herself: "I reckon I don't care one hang." But all the time raw with the bleeding sensation of the wound. And the one that made it just not knowing anything about it. So that it was like being trampled in the dust. Oh Gee! She must just get a move on, that was all. Get on with her job.

It was sure some job.

CHAPTER XX

THE café was closed now. There were only a hundred dollars to Jim's credit in the bank, and Catherine was determined that before they were spent she would get Jim out to the prairie. Work on the Jackson's ranch would bring them their food during the summer months; perhaps even in the winter they could eke out an existence somewhere round about, away from the town. She shuddered at the thought of living amidst the barren waste. How like life it was. Pitiless and glaring with demonstrative cruelty.

Only one had interfered with her continued residence at the café. That was Father Austin.

She suffered his interference with the feeling that, if he knew the reason why she was sticking to her post, he would understand.

He called one evening to ask her what she intended doing should Jim be sent about his business.

He said: "You know, that is what I am afraid will happen. It nearly did before. The town won't stand for him very much longer."

He spoke as though he were in league with her. As though the two of them must put their heads together and do what they could. Yet every now and again

he would say: "I can't help wishing you were out of all this."

She said hopefully: "Maybe, it isn't going to be so bad." And then with terrible regret: "Month after next I reckon we could have got him back to the old country."

Father Austin said: "My child, the old country has its saints, but it harbours a good many sinners as well. Arundale is no more likely to grow a halo over there than he will here."

She said: "I reckon no place could be as bad as this for setting a man on the wrong track."

Father Austin said: "Do you know the East well?"

She answered: "Well enough." And then a little wearily: "If you go around to Doc Wilson's sometime, you can ask him to spin the yarn how well I know the East. Tell him he needn't be so greedy as to keep it all to himself. I reckon you've a right to know. You're as much Jim's friend as he's ever been."

Father Austin said: "And I hope as much your friend, Catherine."

She said: "See here, Father——"

Father Austin smiled. "Bravo," he said.

Catherine blushed. She said: "I reckon it sounds queer."

"Say it oftener and it will not sound as queer."

She said, suddenly, as though she had made a resolve without thinking: "Jim Arundale's just lovely compared to the man I married down East."

And then quickly, before Father Austin could say anything: "I shot him and got ten years for it."

Even then he still sat on without lifting his head.

"But I only did a year and a half. That's why I'm sticking to Jim. I feel I'm doing time in another way."

Father Austin said: "Does Wilson know the whole of the tale?"

She nodded. "Ah—ah."

"Have I your leave to hear it from him?"

"Sure, Father."

He sighed deeply. Then asked: "Are you keeping in touch with Martha Jackson?" His voice sounded as though his concern for her was momentarily increasing. "Good, and you will remember that it takes five minutes to my shack, should you need me."

Again she nodded.

He got up from the chair and held out his hand to her. "We all," he said, "have to do time here or after: so much depends on how we do it. To suffer voluntarily is the Saint's code."

He smiled at her. She opened the door for him. They both looked out at the snow-bound street and the white roofs of the bungalows opposite. The freezing air blew in on their faces.

Father Austin said: "It's a cold world, Catherine, but the time comes when we can look forward to the Chinook."

He had buoyed her up. He had made her feel that her task was not a fruitless one. At nights, when she bolted the doors and drew the curtains and made up the furnace, she seemed shut off from the rest of the town, marooned there alone, waiting for Jim's possible return. And it was all for some good after all. She could not quite get hold of Father Austin's idea of others, as well as herself, doing time. If he considered her a sinner, he had made her seem to herself an appreciable sinner; not, however, minimising her crime. Even in speaking of Jim he never seemed to cast him quite so far away from himself as others did. It was with fresh courage that she set about getting ready for the night. Maybe on the morrow she could find opportunity to talk to Jim. If she could get him sober she might rouse him to the fact that the money they had left in the bank would get them away from Elk's Head before they began to owe any debts around.

If it was true what Father Austin had said, that Jim was likely to be kicked out of the town for good, the sooner she got him away the better.

He would in all probability come in first thing in the morning, and after a sleep of a few hours he would demand his breakfast more from habit than any inclination to eat. She would dawdle and delay the meal so that he might recover from the previous night's debauch. It might be possible to make him see reason. All was not lost; she would try and believe that and make a fresh endeavour. When the thought returned that the

endeavour would have to be made on the prairie, she closed her eyes and for a moment held her breath, much as she had done when Winston Clark had spoken her sentence of servitude.

The bungalow on Second Avenue. For how long would it remain in her thoughts? Maybe she would find her way to that hill overlooking the plain and steal a glance towards Elk's Head. And the riverside, she would think of that too.

For once they left the town, they never could return.

She usually lay down on her bed in her clothes with a rug over her, for often as not she had to descend to the parlour in order to let Jim in, and it might be from any hour in the evening to dawn the following day. She hoped that to-night he would return at a reasonable time, for after a long sleep his head would be tolerably clear. She would listen more intently than usual for his step on the verandah; and this she found she could easily do, for sleep seemed very far away. With the quietness of the night she found her thoughts growing more and more alive with the memory of the evening she had gone around to Doc Wilson's. She wondered what his feelings had truly been when he had stood there listening to her recitation. It struck her for the first time that he must have for a long time been sizing her up. Quite unconsciously she had sat with her hands in her lap with her wrists together, not knowing that he was surreptitiously glancing at her and drawing conclusions of his own. Perhaps his

attentions had been solely for that purpose. Even their discussions over Jim might have been a blind. It was a bitter thought. More than ever in future would she go about with her eyes open and with the secrets of her heart shut away beyond the reach of any.

She had just begun to doze when she heard a step below on the verandah. She got up directly and went down the stairs. Jim was noisily thumping on the outer door, instinctively giving up all endeavour to find the handle. She let him in and shut the door once again. He was standing there trying to balance himself so that he would not topple over. She caught him by the arm to steady him, then guiding him she went behind him and pushed him up the stairs. Once laid on the bed she removed his boots, untied his tie and loosened his collar. Then covered him over with blankets. A mug's game as she had been told, but, under the circumstances, the only one. The more weary the body the following day, the greater craving for spirit. Discomfort, but another thing to drown. She left his door open so that he should get as much air as possible. She closed her own, but did not turn the key. She knew there was no need. She shivered. Going to the door had chilled her. The sight of Jim had chilled her even more. As Father Austin had said, it was a cold world.

It was quite impossible to rouse him. Again and again Catherine returned to his room and saw him

lying sodden and quite incapable of heeding what she said to him. She thought: "Oh, well, I reckon it won't hurt him any to sleep on. All the more chance of pulling him round to talk a bit of sense."

It had grown dark when she heard a knock on the back door. When she went to see who it was she saw Mike Rawlings standing outside. He was panting as though he had hurried a little too fast. He said: "Say, Catherine, kin I have a word with you?"

"Sure, come in, Mike."

He stepped in and scraped the frozen bits of snow off his boots and followed Catherine into the parlour. He asked: "Is Jim here?"

Catherine nodded. "He came home last night, or pretty near dawn this morning; why for do you ask?"

"There's sure some shindy down at the Corona; they're threatening like Hell to come around and getta hold of Jim. I reckon they'll do him in, Catherine; there's no one to care what they do, and there'll be too many for one particular man to be caught after. Jim must have been pretty near mad last night. He's been going to that filthy hole of Dawson's and he must have doped the girl he got last night, 'cos she ain't come round yet and, if she don't, I reckon they'll lynch Jim. He got all her clothes off and he must have carried her to the market and stuck her on the planks where they put the cattle when they're auctioned. They found her there this morning pretty well all froze up and doped to the wide. It took all afternoon to

find Dawson and get out of him who'd been around at his place last night."

Catherine looked frightened. She said: "What can I do, Mike; for the land's sake tell me what I can do?"

He said: "Kin you drive a horse, Catherine?"

"Sure."

"Think you could find the way to Eagle's Crag?"

"Sure."

"But I reckon the track would be covered with the snow all right."

Catherine cried: "I'll find it, Mike. Come on now, let's think whose sleigh can we get? Wait a minute—the Robertson's. You go around and tell them I'll pay double what it's worth if they let you bring it right away. And for the land's sake cut off the bells."

Mike made off. Catherine went up immediately to arouse Jim. He was still lying inert but sat up at her bidding and submitted to having his boots put on. She next fetched a cardigan and slipped his arms into it as though he were a baby being dressed. And a muffler. Then commanded him to stand up while she got him into his overcoat. She made him sit down on the bed again while she went into her room to dress herself. She helped him down the stairs into the parlour, and sitting him in a chair she went into the kitchen and put some food into a box.

Every now and again she would open the door and listen. Mike would bring the sleigh round to the back door. She presently went and secured the latches on

the windows in the parlour and bolted the door. If they came around from the Corona before Mike fetched the sleigh! Oh Gee. What else would they want? Blankets. It would be mighty cold out on the prairie. Then what about a light? She fetched her flash-light. If only the snow had gone. She stood now listening, for she thought she heard sounds coming from the direction of Main Street. Down the stairs again. Jim was dozing quite contentedly. Well now, what would they do if he was going to sleep like that? A horse's hoofs muffled by the snow; no bells. It must be Mike. She opened the door cautiously.

He was standing there. He said: "Got it for sure, Catherine; I reckon you'd better hurry."

"Well, Mike, I reckon I don't look as if I was all for a slack time; here you are——"

She handed him the things she had got ready. She was filled with the exhilaration of energy, with an excitement at outwitting Jim's would-be adversaries. He seemed really and truly to belong to her. Her own. To have left him there to his fate would have been quite impossible. As impossible as though he had been her own child. While Mike took the things from her and put them in the sleigh, she went to test the possibility of getting Jim outside. She spoke to him coaxingly: "Jim, can you rouse up? Try and get a move on, Jim."

He opened his eyes and looked at her unperturbed. She said: "Come on, Honey——"

Mike made a reappearance. They got Jim up from the chair, and between them he was landed in the sleigh. They covered him with blankets. Catherine said: "I reckon he'll fall out unless I keep an eye on him, and I reckon that won't be so mighty easy, driving in the dark."

"He won't roll out, Catherine. How 'bout you, though?"

He looked up at the driver's seat.

Catherine looked at him, amused. She said: "Oh sure, I shall be ever so cosy tucked up there; I'll be snoozing jest all the time. Come on, give me a hand up."

Mike said: "I reckon you'd better keep right along Forty-ninth Street and cut across the prairie till you join up with the track along by the river. You know where the track leaves the river?"

Catherine said: "Sure, I know."

"And you kin judge the distance by the lights from the bungalows on the hill."

"Sure."

"And remember the gully before you get to the Wrights."

Before she could answer, they both heard shouts coming from the direction of Main Street. Catherine took up the reins and urged the horse forward. She said to Mike: "Lock the door, Mike—or, wait a second, don't. Leave it so's they can get inside without knocking the door to bits. You can lock up after they go."

The shouts were unmistakable now. She heard them as they started off. If Mike had any gumption he'd cover as much as he could the tracks the sleigh had made in the snow. But she did not dare look round, for they had no time to lose.

Forty-ninth Street stretched ahead of them for quite a way, but they were going at a good pace. How pleasant the interiors of the bungalows looked as they drove along. Dandy homes some of the people had. The curtains were not drawn, so that the lights gleamed out into the road. There was still a parapet of snow between it and the side-walk. The snow had lasted long this winter. Now the bungalows got fewer. There was just one here and there, with a space in between each. Then at last no more, and only the distance ahead, pitch black. It would be safe now to turn off and strike away right across the prairie. It would mean slow going, anyway until they got to the river track.

If Mike wasn't such a slow old guy he might have thought of getting a horse from somewhere and he could have met her down by the river and gone ahead of them so as to guide the way. It was sure a grim job to drive the horse and keep the flash-light going every now and again. And her hands were already beginning to freeze. She was in for a dandy time! She laughed. What mattered but that she had anyway so far outwitted the Corona crowd. It was more difficult to discover the nearness to the river than she

had anticipated: though she tried to gauge the distance and its whereabouts by the last bungalows to the right of the depôt. If she moved slowly, keeping the town in sight, she reckoned she ought not to take too long getting there. And where the river turned off at right angles, the track led away to the right, then one kept straight on ahead till the Wright's farm was in sight. Anyway, out here in the dark they were safe. Her excitement had died down. She found herself realising that they had left Elk's Head. It had already become a thing of the past. It was queer to think you had made another move on in life all of a sudden like that. Left a bit of life behind you that had seemed, until an hour ago, to be counting for so much. A kind of minor death. She wondered whether, when one died, the illness that might have brought death along would seem very much a thing of the past, as soon as one slipped out.

Quite suddenly now she realised she was near to the river. Near to the spot she had sat in Doc Wilson's auto and learnt for a moment that life could be supreme. She felt no anger now towards him, indeed only generosity, for she thought: "I reckon because a man holds you in his arms, it doesn't mean he wants to keep you there for life, no Sirree."

There was a bit of a dip ahead. She pulled at the reins, and standing up switched the torch on to see if the track showed up at all. But she thought she remembered a place where Wilson had backed the auto in order to turn round. She sat down again, but before

going on she looked behind to see if Jim was safe. He was lying there covered over. It had seemed to get terribly cold. She supposed it was that she noticed it more, now that her mind was not so on the alert and more conscious of herself. The only thing was to move slowly ahead. Nearer the darkness. Though it was dark all round them, the idea of moving on and on made her feel they were getting nearer the darkness. Nearer and nearer. She began to wonder about the girl Jim had ill-treated the night before. Supposing if she never came round. They'd sure get after Jim, then. His only hope would be to get across to Montana before they got him. And she'd have to go along with him. Queer if the two of them had to make off together. The sleigh gave a dip down to one side, pulling the horse to a standstill. Catherine looked at Jim to see that he had not rolled off the sleigh, then urged the horse on. But the sleigh would not move. There was only one thing to do, and that was for her to get down and dig away the snow in which they had got embedded. It would never do to allow the horse to stand still in the cold for long. She threw one of the blankets which she had over herself across its back. But now her fingers were frozen stiff and she found it impossible to make any impression on the snow. She then endeavoured to move the sleigh by pulling at it with all her might. The horse moved forward at the same time and with a struggle it managed to pull the sleigh on.

Catherine climbed up once more to the seat, leaving the blanket on the horse's back. She thought: "We must be on the track all right, for a rut like that to be there. Well, of all the pieces of luck: but if we stick again?" She would risk it, anyway, and see if they could not get on a bit faster. Why, even at this rate they should do the ten miles in two and a half hours. She kept the electric switch on for a time. But the wind was blowing now. It numbed her, so that she could no longer feel the reins in her hands. And there were miles to go yet. Miles. In the snow with the darkness round. If only Jim were awake they could talk to each other, and so the way would not seem so intolerably lonely.

They would not have much to talk about, true. And he would be down ever so low, and in consequence she would find it a necessity to hearten him up. Tell him of the time ahead which, for all they knew, was waiting for them. A good time. They were both young. Life couldn't always be a dish-up for the two of them. But he was asleep—oblivious to the cold, the dark, the loneliness. A coyote was barking now, and not so very far off. Something, besides the cold, made her shiver. She thought of the café. The café would be a good place to be in just now.

Thinking of the café brought Elk's Head before her. The lights of the town had been left very far behind. She had the sense of leaving home for the second time in her life. The place where she and her mother had

lived. She remembered the drive she had taken with Joseph Martinez the morning she had married him. She reckoned she'd rather be taking this drive than that one. Better be driving up here frozen to death, with Jim lying behind in the sleigh, than sitting beside Joseph, hot with fear and sick with apprehension. She looked around her. She wondered whether she could see anything in the darkness that might give her a clue as to how far they had come. A rising hillock or a clump of bushes. Though, of course, the bushes would be covered with snow and not so noticeable as they would be in summer. The sleigh gave another dip down to one side again, so that Catherine put her hand out to save herself from falling sideways. The horse was once again pulled up sharp, and though it made as if to pull the sleigh after it, it struggled in vain. They were stuck tight there, the sleigh at a most impossible angle. Once again she got out and endeavoured to pull the sleigh with all her might. But it was half-way down in the rut and embedded in the snow. What was she to do now? In her agitation she had not noticed that Jim had rolled right to the edge. The only thing was to lay the blanket she had round herself on the ground and put him on it. It would be useless to push him back, as he would only roll off again. She doubled the blanket and pulled him down on to it. He was still heavily asleep. What should she do now? What could she do? Unharness the horse and ride it the rest of the way? She thought:

"Maybe it's a snowdrift we've got stuck in and we're off the track."

She switched the torch on and walked along a few yards, testing the snow with her heel. Her foot sank. A rut assuredly and a curved one, showing that hereabouts the track led round a bit of a corner. She believed she remembered. The time she had driven out with Martha there had been this bit of a turn about a mile and a half before they reached the Wright's farm. A gopher had run across the track just in front of them and startled the mare. She returned to Jim and tucked the blanket well around him. She sure hated to leave him there all alone. He seemed to be shivering violently now and was half awake. She pulled off her mitten with her teeth and rubbed his cheek with her fingers. They were frozen quite stiff and the pain was intolerable. But in feeling the cold of his cheek she thought only: "Poor Jim, I'd better get right off, I reckon." And then: "Jim—Jim, we've had to make off over the prairie and we've got stuck. I'm going to the Wrights for help. I won't be long: cover your head over this way and breathe on your hands."

She tucked the blankets right over his head. Next she attempted to undo the straps of the harness. But her fingers were too frozen and she had to give up the attempt. Well, she would have to walk. What a crazy thing she should have left her rubbers behind. For every step she took forward she seemed to slip

back two. And her legs were so frozen they were like two blocks of wood which she hitched forward in spasmodic jerks. Every now and again she stopped and hit her thighs, endeavouring to get a little circulation back. At last the wind had seemed to die down again, unless it had been that perched up in the sleigh she had felt it more. But, oh say, it was cruelly cold just the same. Some stunt this. She reckoned the Wrights would think it cute the way she had stuck to the trail in the dark. Perhaps they would laugh and tell her that when the Law's after you—or something like it—there's no knowing what you won't do. Martha had once laughed at the Law; thought it mighty funny.

She stopped a moment and sniffed the air. Stabling! She could swear it. The smell of something besides the cold. She brought out the torch and flashed it round. The Wright's fencing but a few yards away. Wasn't that great? She kept the torch alight until she had reached the fence. It would be easy now just to follow it round until she came to the front of the shack. Anyway, it was never a surprise on the prairie for one neighbour to ask assistance of another, any hour of the twenty-four. And the Wrights were decent folk. She knocked on the door: repeatedly, knowing it might take a little time for them to wake and realise there was someone there. And she called, too, for now she had reached her goal she thought of the distance that lay between herself and Jim. She hated to think

that he was left there. Maybe the horse would get restless. And the cold. Would she ever get warm again? She shouted now, and her voice carried upwards. She heard a movement. Yes, someone was coming down the stairs. They would open the door now in a moment or two. Oh, the relief. The relief. Now there was Mr Wright standing in front of her, enveloped in a bearskin coat. He was short, but immensely broad, and his arms were so long that he rather resembled a bear. Catherine remembered suddenly Martha having called him "Old Pa Bruin."

"Say," she began, "I got Jim Arundale way back a mile and a half; the sleigh's got bunged in a rut, kin you help?"

Mrs Wright had now come down. She exclaimed: "For Mercy's sake, if it isn't Catherine Patterson; what do you know about that?" And then in agitation: "Look out, Will, she's going to fall."

CHAPTER XXI

THEY found him as the dawn was breaking. The blanket over him was frozen stiff and sparkling with frost as though it were encrusted with diamonds.

The one that covered the horse, too. It made it look uncommonly like a circus horse adorned thus for its performance. Jim by now did not show that he possessed any sign of life. Will Wright produced a flask and poured a drop of brandy between his lips. He said, and a little unconcernedly, as though to endeavour to save life was a matter neither here nor there: "We'll give you a drop of your own poison, my lad—by Jingo, it knows its way down all right."

He kicked the snow away with the toe of his boot from the rut in which the sleigh was embedded. It took some time, but eventually by urging the horse on he managed to get it dislodged. They would not take long now to get back to the farm, though the horse moved with difficulty, lame and stiff with the drive of the night before. What, for the love of Mick, had started the two of them off at that time of night, he'd like to know? Some game of Jim's for sure. Will Wright reckoned it wouldn't hurt any if the cold had done him in. What business had he anyway to allow a girl, even if she's guts of iron, to take a drive across

the prairie at night. He thought: "I wonder where they're making for?" He'd be glad to keep Catherine on with them till the snow had gone, and it might go any time now, but unless Arundale made himself useful, he'd no wish to have him hanging around.

Good! Marie had got the stove going well, for there was smoke coming out of the chimney. She'd have tea ready as soon as he got this son of a gun inside. Gee. What a waster. Well, anyway, here they were.

When he got down from the sleigh Jim was trying to get up, or rather to prop himself up. He said hazily: "What's the trek for?"

Will Wright said: "That's what I'm busting myself to find out. Catherine knocked us up. She drove eight and a half miles and walked the rest. I reckon if she doesn't know all about it, no one does. You've sure had a tidy sleep."

Jim had seemed to collapse again. Will said: "How'd it be if you were to try to walk?"

But Jim found this impossible to do, or only by being supported almost wholly by Will Wright.

And now he had begun to cough, so that they both had to stop for a moment. When he felt like it he moved on again. But he was looking ghastly, and had begun to shiver violently. As soon as Marie Wright saw him she pushed a large wicker chair up towards him and helped him down into it. His head fell back and his arms dropped down at his sides as though they did not belong to him at all.

Mrs Wright said: "Have you given him any brandy?"

"Sure, but I reckon he's best without it; we'll have a go at him with some tea. Gotta blanket anywhere? He's just about frozen through."

Then he looked round. "Where's Catherine?"

"I got her to bed; she just slipped off to sleep the minute her head was on the pillow; I reckon she'll sleep a week."

"Did she say for why they'd driven from the Head like a pair of crazy gophers?"

"Not a word."

"Is that so?"

"She wasn't fit to speak; that girl's just all in."

Will Wright was looking intently at Jim. He said: "Strikes me this one will be all out if we ain't watching him; jest look at the colour of his lips. For the land's sake, Marie, get the tea."

He took up one of Jim's hands and rubbed it, breathing on it, between whiles.

Mrs Wright said: "Martha told me a while back the Doc in the Head said his heart wasn't any too good, drinking the way he does, and the women. Though it's hardly women what he gets hold of."

"Well, anyway, he's got hold of a woman now all right; I guess there ain't many like Catherine Patterson."

Mrs Wright said: "He ain't gotta hold on Catherine, Will. You gotta big guess coming if you think that."

She held up a cup of tea to Jim's lips. She supported

his head with her other hand. She said with precisely the same command as she spoke to one of the horses in the corral: "Come on, Son, drink this."

Will Wright said: "He's taking it, and his hands are coming warmer."

Mrs Wright poured out two more cups of tea. She said: "You won't hurt with a bit of a warm up yourself."

"How'd it be if we got the rugs down in front of the stove and got him warm that way?"

She went upstairs and fetched a pillow and an immense rug lined with fur. She arranged it in front of the stove, and Jim was laid down and covered over with a couple of blankets.

They both looked down on him. He appeared immensely tall, stretched out like that upon the floor.

And singularly youthful. He was sleeping most peacefully, and rather as though he had earned his sleep. No hint of a debit of guilt upon his face. It was very calm. His whole attitude personified repose. Well, there was nothing to do but to leave him to sleep. And Catherine as well.

Leaving Jim, Marie went up to have a look at her. She had tumbled Catherine into their own bed and she lay there peacefully sleeping, too, as Jim was, downstairs. A couple of children. That's what Marie thought. One, out of hand with unforgivable sins to his credit; but to Marie, a childless woman with long years spent on the prairie, a child for all that. To be tended and

nursed back to the life which God had given him and which he had abused. And this other child, too, sleeping with her head on the pillow. What on earth had she been about, that she should be tending to Jim Arundale much as a devoted mother might do? There must be some reason for it, though people did very much what they pleased without giving a reason, out here in the West. After all, wasn't it pretty well a dunghill for derelicts? But derelicts were human. One had to remember that. And the ones who weren't derelicts did remember it, and were always ready to hold out a hand.

Marie moved round from room to room, starting in with the morning's work. There was breakfast to get first. Will would be sure ready for that after his drive that morning. They would have to talk in whispers with Jim lying on the floor.

She wondered when the two of them would need a meal. Once they had a sleep and something to eat, they'd revive in a twinkling. And then she wondered what they intended doing. She reckoned they were making for Martha's place. Though old George wouldn't be too pleased at having Jim Arundale suddenly thrust on him. It wouldn't be beyond him to give him notice to quit on arrival, even though the snow was still on the ground. What a blessing if the winter was over. She wondered what the sound was coming from below. It was Jim coughing. She did not know that she liked

the sound of that cough. It sounded pretty deep-set. She must see that the stove was well made up. Anyway, the kettle would be boiling by now and she would get breakfast right away.

While they were at breakfast, she said cautiously: "I reckon we'll hear all about it when Catherine wakes up."

Will Wright grunted.

Marie said: "Maybe he'd been told to clear out and they hadn't the money to go by rail."

They were talking in whispers and looking every now and again at Jim.

Marie thought: "If Will gets to know it's something real bad Jim's been given the boot for, he'll sure turn him out, else it'll mean the fellows in town won't have any use for him next time he goes in."

She could see that Will was pondering over the events of the morning.

He said: "I reckon it's queer how that girl sticks to Jim."

Marie said: "I reckon it's queer how any woman sticks to any man, but they do."

She thought: "He smells a rat."

It worried her. Whatever Jim had done, she would hate to see the two of them shunted off again in the snow. Anyway, it would be impossible before the horse had sufficient rest. It would take a day or two for any of them to revive sufficiently to continue their journey. But Catherine, probably because she sub-

consciously had the fear of being pursued, did not sleep for long, although she was exhausted. The moment she woke she listened instinctively for the possible sleigh-bells of their pursuers. But no sound came. She only heard Marie in the room downstairs, working around. Will Wright must be outside somewhere, for there came no sound of voices. Catherine sat up. What was there to do but to move on as fast as they could, for in the morning the runner tracks of the sleigh would probably be traced? And what would ten miles be in the day-time? She did not know, however, how she would continue to drive, for as she stood up now she ached abominably all over and her legs felt weak and useless. She went down to Marie. Marie was stirring something in a cup. Jim was lying on the floor. Every now and again he coughed, and she could see that he was shivering violently.

Marie said: "I want him to drink this while it's hot."

She knelt down beside Jim. She looked up at Catherine and said: "Hold his head up, like a dear, I want him to swallow this if he can."

Catherine knelt down and supported Jim's head. They both tended him without saying a word.

Presently Marie said: "Looks like he's been going it pretty hard, Catherine."

Catherine said: "I reckon that's so, Mrs Wright."

After a moment or so, Marie said: "See here,

Catherine, folks don't quit a town like you two have, 'cause they want a bit of a picnic. What's he done? Will will want to know for sure, and if you don't tell him, he'll go into town and sure find out all about it."

Catherine whispered: "If they get him—maybe they'll lynch him."

"Oh say, what for the land's sake has he done now?"

"He pretty near did a girl from Dawson's in, and left her on the cattle planks to freeze."

Marie said: "When Will knows that, he'll sure turn him out."

Catherine said: "I guess he will, but I reckon we can move on without Mr Wright having to kick us out."

Marie said: "It looks to me as though Jim was mighty bad."

"I can't help that, Mrs Wright; I reckon I must get him along, somehow. Another thirty-seven miles. Oh Gee."

"Do you reckon to get as far as Martha's?"

"Ah—ah."

Marie said: "But George will turn him out."

Catherine said: "I reckon that's so. I didn't just think about anything last night but to get away from the town."

Marie said: "There's a shack five miles on—you gotta turn away a bit to the left; it's off the track. A

Dutchman left it a few months back to go to a brother, Winnipeg way. He hasn't left it for good; maybe you could get in and put up there. I'll see you get some stores and some wood."

Catherine nodded. She said: "See here, don't you worry about your husband. I'll go right now and tell him how Jim and me are fixed. I reckon it isn't fair he should go wondering what it's all about. If the police are after Jim, I won't risk him being caught on your farm, no Sirree; I reckon Jim's my show."

Marie said: "Will's down by the corral. Slip on that coat, Catherine."

She looked absurd in the great coat that it was. She stoode nveloped in it and not a bit self-conscious, so that she appeared ridiculous. She looked at Marie gravely as though there was nothing odd standing like that and contemplating a visit down to the corral in order to tell Will Wright that as she was in charge of a man other men would not shelter under their roof, she was all for removing him rather than allow him to bear the indignity of being shifted unceremoniously to his next halting-place. She stood there, indeed, as though it were but a trifle in life to be caring thus for a man who was considered by all to be beyond care and human aid. Marie suddenly rose from the ground. She went towards Catherine. She said: "Honey, what in the world are you doing it for?"

Catherine, too, stepped towards Marie. Her hand

went up to her throat. She thought: "Oh Gee, she's like Momma; I reckon if I stand here, I'll let her put her arms round me."

But she said, quite sturdily: "I reckon I just gotta stick to him, Mrs Wright; he saved my life the time I was so ill, and he ain't got anybody in the world but me."

Marie said: "Any dandy fellow would be mighty proud to have you for his wife, Catherine; I jest can't make it out."

Catherine tried to laugh. "Maybe," she said, "I'll find a dandy fellow one day, if there's one hanging around anywhere handy."

She went in search of Will. She found him, as Marie had said, down by the corral. She told him, quite directly, that he was harbouring a man not only wanted by the police, but by a common herd who would, likely as not, string him up to the nearest tree, even if they had to walk twenty miles to find one.

Will was nonplussed. But Catherine gave him no time in which he could expound to her the impossibility of keeping any such man under his roof. She told him, without delay, that she intended moving on as soon as he thought the horse was fit for another five miles. She ended with: "Mrs Wright told me about a Dutchman's hut. I reckon we'll go there for a bit. If the crowd comes along you can say we've quit, 'cause you weren't going to stand having Jim Arundale around your place."

He said: "Catherine, we'll sure give you anything you want."

It suddenly struck her: "Why, I'm letting them think they'd be as pleased as Punch to have me stay if I was alone, and all the time I reckon they'd feel as queer over me as they do over Jim."

Will said: "We'd be sure glad to have you stay with us, Catherine."

Should she tell him and finish with the pretence. No, she couldn't—she couldn't. She laughed: "Don't you be so mighty sure." And then: "I reckon you wouldn't like to lend a mare of yours for the sleigh and I could bring her back tomorrow. We could trek at once."

Will nodded agreement. He said: "Sure I will, Catherine."

She said: "I'll get right along then and see what Mrs Wright can let us have to take." She said gratefully: "I reckon you and Mrs Wright are real kind. I'd have you know that Jim Arundale's been as straight as the rail-track all along with me; he's jest all right when he keeps on the water-wagon."

"Sure, I know that, Catherine."

"Maybe there's as many as bad in the Head and no one finds out."

"I reckon that's so."

She left him and returned to Marie. She said: "Your husband's fine; he's going to hitch the mare on to the

sleigh and let me bring her back tomorrow. Next time he goes into town I'd like him to get that hundred dollars out of the bank and sell the café up."

She was stooping over Jim now. She said: "Mrs Wright, Jim's sick, isn't that so?"

"Ah—ah, Catherine, no mistake, he's sick all right."

"I reckon it was the cold."

"His kind don't live long."

Catherine looked up startled. His kind don't live long. His kind. The kind that she had been able to hitch on to. The kind with whom she had made a home. A home. She cried: "For Mercy's sake, don't say that, Mrs Wright."

"You don't love him, Catherine?"

Catherine cried again: "He's all I've got."

"But he'll never be any good."

Catherine was holding Jim's hand against her cheek. And she was crying. It was no good just for the moment pretending that she was too stubborn for tears. But it was only for a moment. She got up and said: "I reckon it's no good starting in to thank you and Mr Wright for all you've done for us. The sooner we get along, the better."

Marie said: "I guess I'll come along too. There used to be a dandy stove in that shack; if we get a fire going it'll soon air the place."

Catherine was sniffing her tears away. She said: "Sure, we'll be real cosy there."

She was smiling again.

Marie said: "My! Catherine, you make me cry."

Catherine said: "For the land's sake, Mrs Wright, whatever for?"

CHAPTER XXII

FIVE miles. Seemingly a short distance on the prairie, but a way once travelled appears longer than when it is well known. While Catherine felt the urge to move onward, she had an inward regret at leaving the Wright's comfortable homestead. The future was full of uncertainty. The next few days might end in unbearable horror. Her determination to protect Jim at all costs brought a queer sort of safeguard of optimism.

He had lain in her arms as Marie Wright drove them the five miles to the Dutchman's shack. They found it in order and tolerably clean. Jim was laid once more on the floor while the stove was lighted and the thin mattress taken off the bed and aired. She was so anxious that he should be made comfortable, that over and over again she pressed the mattress with her hand to test its dampness, and arranged it round the stove so that the steam began to be drawn away from it. They had brought enough food and wood to last a couple of days. Marie promised, then, to return with more. She would have to drive the mare and sleigh back, for the Dutchman had put nothing up in the way of stabling. But Catherine said it would be useless anyway to attempt a further drive with Jim in his present condition. And as there was the possibility of George Jackson refusing

to keep Jim at his place, they might as well stay where they were. Catherine said: "Only we'd be nearer the border if we want to get right away."

Marie said: "I reckon they'd be out here after him by now, Catherine, if they meant to catch him."

Catherine said: "Do you think so, Mrs Wright. I just feel queer when I think we may hear them coming along."

"Don't you worry, Catherine. Let's make some tea, and then I must be getting back. How'd it be if we got Jim on to the mattress? I reckon it won't be aired for hours yet. Do you think you can keep the stove going to-night? I sure hope the wood will last."

Now they were left: the two of them together alone in the Dutchman's hut and no one nearer than the Wrights, five miles off. The snow around for miles and nothing to listen to but the coyotes. But in the silence there was safety. And if she could not keep the vigil, who could? She had told Father Austin that she was doing time. Practice made perfect. Quite resignedly now she was prepared to sit there by Jim's side through the night, for a few years before had it not been her custom to sit hour after hour on a hardened bench? And the floor? She could surely sleep on the floor and forget, as she had had to do before, that planks were hard. If only Jim showed signs of rousing from his lethargy. He had fever, there was no doubt about that. But maybe his rest to-night would do him good.

She hoped she would not sleep too heavily herself, for the stove must be kept going and Jim must be given nourishment. The glow from the stove was comforting and there seemed no need to keep a candle alight. She picked up an old newspaper from the floor and went to see if she could, in some way, put it over the window so that no possible light would show, supposing anyone were around. Few at the Head might know of this little hidden shack, for the Dutchman had evidently been an unobtrusive fellow.

Perhaps for to-night she need not allow herself to be obsessed with fears. Every hour they were left alone without being pursued meant assurance for the future. And if a day or so passed they would know then that they were safe. She did not think of Jim as being taken alone. They should not separate her from Jim, whatever happened. No strength that they possessed would tear her from him. Gee, how she'd fight. The logged walls of the shack made her look round instinctively for the gun which should, by rights, be leaning up in a corner, ready to hand. The wind had begun to howl around the shack: first in fits and starts. She shivered. There'd be a night of this. But why should she mind? Here they were alone together. But Jim was lying so quiet there, he seemed hardly to count as another human being. She went over to him, and kneeling by the bed took up his hand. It was queer how you could feel pity for a man because, being unshaven, made him look kinder forlorn. It altered him.

He did not look the same, especially as his eyes were closed. But as soon as she looked at his mouth there was no mistaking who it was. He had finely-moulded lips and, as Catherine had once said, when he smiled it was no wonder the women got all fussed up over him. You only had to tell him a little bit of a tale and he would smile and say: "Is that so?" And give that little quick turn of the head, as much as to interrogate a little farther still. Then, when he was thoughtful, his eyes were ineffably sad and he would look far, far into the distance, as though, beyond reach, there lay a prize which never could be won. She thought: "Poor Jim."

Yet it was pity alone which called up this tenderness in her. She saw he had, now that she was kneeling by him and was so closely scrutinising him, beautiful features, and even in this rough, unshaven condition he looked unmistakably well bred. The kind that so often came out from the old country and went to rack and ruin out here in the West. What heart-break it would be, after all, if she loved him. And where would be her sacrifice, if it was by his side she chose to be?

The wind was howling worse than ever. She would make up the stove well and warm up the soup Marie had brought along, so that Jim could have a little, and she would have a little herself. And then maybe she could wrap herself up in one of the blankets and sleep on the floor in front of the stove.

It was curious how one could be conscious the moment one woke that the night had gone by and something along with it. The logs had burnt very low. She got up, for it would never do not to keep the stove going well. She first looked at Jim. He was no longer asleep, but his eyes being open did not give her the feeling that he was awake. He spoke softly to her. He asked her if she had slept well as though, before she had closed her eyes, this had been a desire of his, that she should find refreshment. She told him that she had had a dandy sleep.

He said: "We've come a good distance."

She said: "Sure, we have."

His speech reminded her of the first time they had encountered each other. He had become, once again, excessively English.

He sighed: "It seemed a pity to leave: it's always so jolly in the autumn."

Catherine said: "Sure." And looked at him. She thought: "He's queer in the head."

But about the stove: before she did anything for Jim she must put on some more wood. It was lighter now and soon the sun would be getting up. She imagined it felt not quite so cold. Especially as they were in a shack that had been empty all winter. But she did not know that the light or the imagined warmth brought as cheerful a spirit as they might. She should consider really that all was going well. She looked as

cheerfully as she could manage at Jim, and said: "You shall have some tea presently."

He said: "Thanks."

She thought: "For the land's sake why can't he say 'That'll be fine.' I don't like the way he's talking."

She went to the window and, taking away the piece of paper she had stuck up, she screwed it into a ball and rubbed it over the top of the table.

Jim said, without taking any notice of her actions: "I like it here."

"Sure," she said, "it's a dandy shack."

He closed his eyes again then, as if the last few moments had been full of contentment. But his seeming contentment brought her no assurance. She must make him some tea, certainly. She wondered if he would eat a little of something. She stood over him and watched him a moment or two. He lay there very quiet. She went to the window from which she had taken the paper. It was small, but from it one could see the miles as they stretched away—away. In which direction was she looking? West? She wondered whether to look West like that the first time you looked out of a strange window was a good or a bad omen. Surely it was better than if she looked North: in the direction of Elk's Head. Elk's Head. The café. Forty-ninth Street. Main Street. Way across the river. Nothing much but the cruder part of the town where the Chinks and Dagoes lived, mostly. Back again to the more appreciable side. The stores. Lit up at night,

they looked almost festive and reminded one of Bloor Street in Toronto. And Quebec. Though Quebec was different to Toronto.

Now and again to walk down Main Street reminded her oddly of Toronto. Main Street. Closing her eyes she might be walking down the side-walk: over the rail-tracks, a bit farther on until she came to Second Avenue, lined each side with Californian bungalows. What was the use of going back in one's mind and remembering anything that related to the past. It was done with. All the sweetness and the bitterness, the meetings and the leave-takings. There was so much in between. All this wide expanse of snow. And even when it disappeared, the little yellow tufts of grass would make the expanse, if anything, wider and more separated from any place on earth.

But this would never do. She must tend to Jim. She must get him through with this sickness as she had done before. And besides, she was terribly hungry herself. There was a loaf of Marie's home-made bread and a pat of butter from the dairy. That was enough to tempt anyone, if anything could. How she wished Jim could sit up at the queer little rickety table and enjoy it with her. The meals at the café. There she was again, remembering things that she should allow slip back into the past.

She began to cut a slice off the home-made loaf when she was conscious of someone dismounting from a horse just outside the window.

She dropped the knife from her hand and sprang instinctively to Jim's side, then moved a step or two forward so as to stand between him and the door. Her instinct—and now it was one of desperation—made her take that hasty glance round, searching, in vain, for the sight of a gun.

There was a knock on the door now. She called: "Come right in."

He came. The chief of the police in the Head, and well known to her. He was one who had frequented the café in his leisure moments, until Catherine had rebuffed him, much as she had rebuffed the man from Montana. He had taken his rebuff in much the same way, only with any temptation to insult her kept quietly under control. She said: "Got any others with you?"

He said: "You weren't wishing for a party, were you? If so, I reckon you've gotta nother wish comin'."

"Is that so? Well, if you are going to do all the back chat, I reckon you can do it outside."

She moved over to him. She said: "I reckon, if you don't mind I'll shut this door: it ain't too good for some that has pneumonia to have a breeze blowing on them."

"He's sick, then?"

She nodded.

"How'd it be if I was to feel his pulse?"

She said: "You'd be a darned clever guy if you was to find it."

"I reckon I'll have a try."

She said, a little suspiciously: "You ain't come out alone; where are the other guys?"

"Sure," he said, "I'm alone. The others were mad having to stop behind."

"Who stopped them?"

He said: "Doc Wilson. I suppose being partly Scotch he kinder hated the thoughts of a picnic on the Sabbath."

She said: "And he wasn't for joining in the picnic?"

"Sure, he was as mad as the others to get here, but his auto caught on the kerb and landed him in the ditch. His arm got broke."

"Did he send you?"

He grinned. "We don't take orders from any darned doctors, but we don't mind obliging them, when we've a mind to."

"You're good at obliging folk, ain't you? I sure heard of your kind acts the minute I set foot in the Head."

He knew she was alluding now to a man who had slipped from justice sometime back. She recollected the number of dollars the man in front of her was supposed to have profited by his escape. He was not above bribery. It was good to recollect this. He interrupted her reverie and insisted now that she should stand on one side and allow him to pass into the shack.

She looked at him earnestly and said: "I ain't lying, he's mighty sick. He's gone all queer somehow. A

half-hour in the snow would just about finish him off altogether. See here, we gotta heap still left in the bank. How much would you take to git right back to the Head and say you'd missed us—that we'd got over the border——”

He said: “I got so much in the bank myself, that I jest don't know what to do with it all.”

He spoke as though he were thoroughly amused. As though unwittingly she had drawn a curtain aside and showed him a mine of such wealth as he had never seen. His eyes were glittering. He said, slowly: “I don't know that dollar notes are always so mighty tempting.”

“You ain't taking any?”

“No,” he said, “not dollar notes.”

She said: “I see.”

He was eyeing her up and down, from her face to her breast, where he kept his gaze, and then back again to her eyes. She might have once more been standing near to Joseph Martinez, for the sensation of sickness that suddenly passed over her. She said: “What'll they do to Jim if they get him back there?”

“I shouldn't like to say.”

“What do you want him for?”

“That ain't none of your business.”

“You don't reckon Jim's my business?”

He had begun now to look at the door as though he might as well clinch matters and walk right in. She

pushed him on one side as though it were she who held the Law in her hand and not he.

She said: "You ain't for sharing what you get? I reckon that's why you came out alone."

"You're right," he said, "I ain't for sharing."

She laughed: "Some grafter, eh?" And then: "That's settled, then; you'll have a look at him, but you ain't for taking him back?"

He said: "As you say."

They went into the shack. Catherine kept a strict watch so that she might detect any movement of his hands which she suspected might jerk suddenly in the direction of his pocket. But he stood quite motionless by the bed. Presently he took up Jim's hand. His mouth twisted in disgust that his time had been so wasted and his prediction for gain of some sort so thoroughly misapplied. He let Jim's hand drop out of his. And then he turned on his heel and left the two of them together.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHE had been putting a log or two on at a time to keep the stove burning, for she realised that not only had she been burning too much, but she had left the remaining logs to get too dry, so that they burnt quickly when they put on the stove. And if they ran out of wood they would certainly freeze. Especially if the wind got up as it had the night before. There seemed very little soup left, too. And she could hardly believe she had eaten so much of the home-made loaf. She was hungry now, but if she ate any more there would not be enough left for tomorrow morning, and Marie Wright might not make an appearance till late in the day. Supposing if anything prevented her from coming? Supposing if Attridge had forbidden anyone to bring relief.

But she felt he had not left the shack with any resentment against Jim. Why? Something within her prompted a reply, but she would not allow any such prompting. There was another night to go through: with the wind howling and the coyotes barking. And after to-night was over, how many more? How could Jim, who showed no signs of improving, continue with their journey? If they reached the Jackson's ranch and found shelter there, as soon as George found out

Attridge had visited them, he would not offer them further hospitality. But what was the good of thinking of a journey he would never make? Perhaps, after all, this would be the last night. She was beginning to allow the truth to take definite growth in her mind now.

But all the same she would cling to the hope of saving him. She thought: "If only *he* was here, I reckon he could do Jim a world of good; they say he picks corpses right out the grave." She had heard of weakly children just all but going out, but he always brought them back. He was so strong. What was it that Attridge had said: he had started on his way in order to get to them and he had had an accident. In spite of it, even now he might come. It was unlike Fate to rob Doc Wilson of a chance of saving life. But in the meantime Jim was getting weaker. She looked at him and saw that he had opened his eyes and was looking at her.

He said: "Have you ever seen *The Yeoman of the Guard*?"

"For the land's sake, no—have you?"

"Good Lord, yes, hundreds of times."

He seemed to want to talk, so she sat beside him and stroked his hand. Every now and again she would say:

"You feel a bit better, Jim?"

And he would say: "Yes, thanks."

He slept sometimes. Once for quite a long time, and so peacefully that Catherine crept about, putting just one more log in the stove and cutting minute slices

off the loaf and nibbling at them. The day had gone now and it was difficult to know whether to be glad or regret its going. He was dying. She knew it now. By the careless dropping of Jim's hand Attridge had conveyed the truth to her. And he had ridden away and left them alone together. Left her to watch Jim through another day and perhaps through another night. With the wind howling and the coyotes barking. It would not be necessary to cover the window over, for they were in hiding no longer. And there were only a few logs now to put in the stove. She would soon be sitting in the cold and in the dark save for the burning of a candle. She lit it now, for she could not bear to remain in the dusk with Jim sleeping so quietly, like that.

He felt most terribly cold. She put the blanket, in which she had wrapped herself the night before, over him and tucked him up. She knelt down beside the bed and put her arm right over him, and held him close against her. How it comforted her, the feel of him in her arms. She felt she could hold him there for ever. For ever. But that was a long time and there was not such a thing as a long time where Jim was concerned. There was the acknowledgement that he was going from her uppermost in her mind now. He was leaving her. And she felt that she could not let him go. But if she could save him, what would it be for? He seemed happy the times he was awake and conscious. Quite oblivious that there was not a soul

in the world caring for him but herself. She should really be feeling glad for him. Perhaps it was only on her own account she felt the terrible regret that she should be left alone. He stirred now in her arms and panted a little as though overcome by heat. She put her other arm under him and raised him a little. He was speaking again now but with his eyes closed.

"I wish I could remember the last verse, but I never can—I don't know why. 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.'" He turned to Catherine and said: "Isn't it funny, I can never remember the last verse."

Presently he said: "I'm sorry, I really am, most awfully sorry. I call it rotten luck."

She held him closer—closer. So that his head was pressing against her little breast. She loved to look down and see him there. She smoothed his hair away from his forehead. She did not seem to notice that he was unshaven. Anyway, she did not mind. She wished he would open his eyes and call her Catherine. He seemed so far away, in another world entirely different.

Now he sighed and said: "If only Eversley had made another two runs."

She knew he was dead but she would not release him out of her arms. She kept him there until the morning, when she knew that she must at last let him go and somehow endeavour to reach the Wright's farm. She let him rest back then and covered him over. The

task she had set herself out to accomplish was finished. Its failure was indeed final. But she had had her triumph. Standing there she remembered the months when the café had been a going concern. And she had made it so. But then again, when a thing ended in disaster, was the triumph worthy of thought? Did it not make life seem all the more bitter to look back upon, when one considered the worthlessness of effort? Take most certainly what was in the day's work as it came along, but not go soaring up to a height which could never be reached. She aimed too far, too high. There was now no need to put wood on the stove, even if there had been any left. There was no bread; she had eaten the last little bit. Everything was finished. Everything. She crossed the shack and opened the door. Then gave a cry. The snow had all disappeared, the grass was as green as ever it could be on the prairie. There was no cold breeze blowing in on her. The sun was up and the air was warm; warm and gentle. She held out her hands to the warmth. If only Jim could come out and see it all. She stepped outside. She sheltered her eyes with her hand and looked round. There was no doubt about it.

The Chinook had come.

In the distance she saw someone riding towards her. There was no need now to fear any that might come out from the town. They could do no harm to Jim. Anyway, it could not be Doc Wilson, for if he came,

he would be in his auto. But now she saw. Father Austin. She thought: "I reckon he's good coming out this way when he has so many in town." He was waving to her now. Maybe he was thinking he'd be in time to do something for Jim. Jim had had such a liking for him all along. Somehow she felt, now that he was so close and getting off the horse, that she could not speak. It was somehow bursting on her, all that had happened.

Father Austin came up to her. He said quickly: "How is he?"

Catherine did not speak; she only looked at him as much as to say: "I reckon I've never felt like this before."

He said: "Shall we go into the shack, Catherine?"

She turned and took him in. It seemed more terrible now to see Jim lying there under the blanket. Those few moments in the sun had made her realise how dark the times had been till now. She knelt down by his side, and flinging her arms across his form she cried to him: "Jim—Jim."

Father Austin leant over her and laid his hand on her shoulder. He did not speak for a moment, but she felt the pressure of his hand, and it contained so much sympathy that after a moment she stopped giving vent to her grief. He said: "I know how terribly you must feel it. It's one of those difficult things which come our way—our efforts all apparently wasted, not even a hope left. But how can we judge? After all,

only God knows both how hopeless he was and how much—perhaps how little—he was to blame. All the things that went against him, chances that came too late, hidden efforts that he made which failed—God knows all these and we cannot. So don't you think we can leave him in God's hands? Just pray for him, being sure that God alone has both loved and understood him? Did he speak at all before he died? "

" Sure, he was talking a bit; he was trying to say a hymn he'd known—' Gentle Jesus.' "

Father Austin said: " He always comes to each one of us, across the water."

CHAPTER XXIV

AND now the snow was long forgotten. Even the memory was hard to revive, with the sun kissing the prairie with its warmth after its cruel usage through the winter months. In the town, the grass which edged the side-walks was emerald green after being covered by the snow, and the gardens showed signs of rewarding those who so carefully tended to them.

And out on the prairie the fear of many things was now dispersed. As Martha said, to take a peep out of the window didn't send your heart down into your boots as it had a few months back.

She said to Catherine: "You should have been here all winter to appreciate this."

Catherine wondered. Was it true that you couldn't appreciate what was good unless something terrible had gone before? If good ever came to her she ought to appreciate it all right. She laughed. But it never would come, so she needn't worry any. After resting awhile with Martha here she would move on farther West. British Columbia sounded all right, that was if anything could be all right as far as she was concerned. She wasn't going to hope for too much. Just somehow, hang around, and make a living with a little less spirit than she had had before. Kinder feel that

nothing was worth much while. And where any said they offered their friendship she'd sure treat it as though it might as well be there as not, but it was the same to her if it wasn't.

She would never feel again that a thing was so good that it would last for ever. There was one thing, however, that she would never regret. And that was her effort to do for Jim what no one had ever in his life done for him, or made any attempt to. And she would believe that he had been worth as much as any who had had the better chance. People who didn't need you weren't worth needing. No Sirree. It was good to sit here on the prairie and figure out a philosophy of your own. No one else's was any good. But it wouldn't do to sit there dreaming. She had promised Minty she would go down and help her cut out some night-dresses.

She stood up so that the wind blew her hair back from her temples. The wind fanned the grass so that it bowed continually towards the South. But here she was facing the North. There was the plain below. Far away in the distance—down there somewhere Jim was buried. Oh Gee, what wouldn't she give to see him again measuring the coffee out of the canister, whistling the while? And the other?

She had heard since that he had been badly hurt. He had skimmed a corner in order to get to Jim after Attridge had returned and given him his report, so that the wheel of the auto had caught on the kerb of the

side-walk. He hadn't failed Jim. She wished Jim had known.

The wind now stopped blowing for a moment, and in the lull there sounded footsteps behind her.

She turned and held her breath. Doc Wilson was standing there. His arm was in a sling and he looked infinitely saddened.

He looked at her without speaking for a moment, and then said: "I couldn't get here before—do you resent my coming?"

"For Mercy's sake, no; I reckon the prairie don't belong to me all that much."

She had not meant to speak so. God knew that she was not in the mood to be audacious any longer. And he looked as though he were in need of sympathy. Doc Wilson, in need of sympathy! She wouldn't have believed it unless she had seen him standing there so, silent and a little subdued.

She said: "You don't look too good."

He replied: "I have felt Arundale's death keenly. It is possible to regret a thing even when you know that what has happened is for the best. And I feel ashamed, for I was intensely jealous of him."

She said, as what he had suggested was beyond all reason: "Oh, I reckon no one need have been jealous of poor Jim: he jest had nothing in the world——"

"He had your love."

She cried, and as though she regretted terribly having added unmeaningly to Jim's beggary: "No, he hadn't,

and he knew it, poor Jim. I jest loved him as if he'd been my own child."

He said: "You make me more ashamed than ever."

She thought: "Seems a kinder way he's got, making you feel as though you counted a powerful lot to him, and all the time it's jest that he's being real nice, same as he is to everybody."

She said: "I reckon you were always mighty good to Jim."

"I realised his possibilities. After all, there are few people who are made of real gold; and those that are, never get tarnished."

He was looking at her intently all the time he was speaking. He stepped nearer to her. He said: "Sure you didn't love Arundale?"

She turned away from him and something choked her. For a moment she stood with her back towards him. So he came then and stood very close to her. His arm which was in the sling was pressed against hers. She turned to him then, her eyes full of entreaty that he should go and leave her rather than torment her in this way.

But then she heard him say: "You know that I've been crazy over you—Catherine, just crazy."

She said, looking up at him: "Is that so?"

So that he laughed and put his arm round her and held her to him for a very long time.



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